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# Warriors-Clans

THUNDERCLAN

Clan Leader-Lionstar

Deputy- Cloudstorm (Wolfpaw)

Medicine cat- Amberheart (Honeypaw)

Warriors

- Crookedfin

- Windchime

- Cedarfox

- Bluefang (Thunderpaw)

- Blackscar

- Dewstream

- Eaglewing (Firepaw)

- Silverfall (Wolfpaw)

- Whitemoss

- Skyfire (Moonpaw)

- Featherflame

- Jaypool (Darkpaw)

- Shadowtail (Bramblepaw)

-Bumbletree

Elders

-Littlefur

- Mouseleap

- Graynose

Queens

- Featherflame

-Silverfall

RIVERCLAN

Clan Leader- Redstar

Deputy- Runningleaf

Medicine cat- Rockpool (Featherpaw)

Warriors

- Rainstep

- Snakebark

- Swiftpelt (Galepaw)

- Brightfur

- Whitefin

- Pebblestream (Flowerpaw)

- Sandear (Onepaw)

- Molefur

- Wetnose

- Webclaw

- Antwhisker

- Appleheart

Elders

-Tornpelt

- Woodleaf

Queens

- Appleheart

- Sandear

SHADOWCLAN

Clan Leader- Nightstar

Deputy- Foxear

Medicine cat- Greenpelt (Littlepaw)

Warriors

- Scarfur

- Heatherfur

- Strongclaw

- Windflower

- Stripepelt

- Thornwhisker (Tinypaw)

- Featherclaw

- Tigerstream (Tumblepaw)

- Dawnleaf (Hollypaw)

- Tanglepelt

- Yellowstripe (Moonpaw)

- Dirtstripe

Elders

- Greenfur

- Spottedfur

-Spidernight

Queens

- Tanglepelt

- Featherclaw

WINDCLAN

Clan Leader- Lonestar

Deputy- Moonstripe

Medicine cat- Longfur (Windpaw)

Warriors

- Fastclaw (Tailpaw)

- Goosewhisker

- Ratpelt (Rockpaw)

- Blackjay

- Crowleaf (Littlepaw)

- Birdclaw

- Breezefur (Blackpaw)

- Mallowpelt

- Wingfall (Bluepaw)

- Roundwind

- Barkwhisker (Brindlepaw)

- Downpelt

- Sharpleaf

Elders

-Clawface

-Poppycloud

Queens

-Roundwind

-Mallowpelt

-Birdclaw

# Chapter 1

[image]

~Fire

＜Prologue＞

Tigerstar's back, and he's back for vengeance- he intends to enlist his grandson's help. His grandson, as clan leader of Thunderclan, is torn between Tigerstar's threats against his clan and the newly announced prophecy. With the arrival of two young kits that might be coincidentally mentioned in the prophecy, Lionstar must make the toughest decisions that he will ever make in this lifetime.

Chapter 1: Into the territory

Thunder let out a startled yelp as she stumbled on a thorn. It was embedded into her flesh, and she let out a whimper of pain. "Fire, it hurts!" She wailed in distress. Fire, her brother, an orange-brown tabby with striped fur, looking just like her, immediately slowed his steps to wait for his sister. His eyes were full of concern as he whispered, "Are you okay?" Thunder shook her head.

"It really, really hurts. Take it out please, Fire!"

Fire stared at the thorn. Blood was dripping slowly down the sides of the wound, and he frowned. He gripped the thorn firmly in his teeth, accidentally biting into Thunder's flesh, making her wince. Then he tried again, and pulled the thorn out with a quick tug. He spat it onto the forest floor, and looked at his sister.

"Thanks, Fire!"

Thunder's paw was still numb with pain, but it was better now, with the thorn out. They started padding forward again, at a slower pace since Thunder could not keep up with her wounded paw. They continued on, only to realize that their father and brother had gone. Fire growled in displeasure.

"Where's Rock? And Blue's gone too?" Thunder whimpered in fright. She pressed herself closer to her brother. Fire looked around and tried to scent them, but could not detect their scent at all; they were completely lost. They had stopped, standing in a defensive stance under a tree.

A loud, threatening growl sounded from behind them, and they spun around instinctively. They came face to face with five hostile cats, their claws unsheathed, their heads held high. Fire pushed his sister behind him protectively. He growled back boldly, even though he was terrified inside.

These were forest cats, wild and unpredictable; they could kill him with one swipe of their paws. Just thinking of them made him shiver inside. "Touch her and you die!" he spat angrily, his ears flattened. A dark brown tabby stepped out and he glared at Fire.

"Who are you and why are you trespassing?" He asked lowly, his amber eyes narrowing suspiciously. Fire bowed his head as he replied, "I'm sorry, we didn't know there were any cats here. We were just following our father but we got lost." The cat continued to glare at them with a cold, frigid stare. "Oh really? We didn't spot other intruders at our borders. Do not lie to us."

Fire sighed and shook his head in exasperation. "I'm not lying, okay? What do you think two kits can do alone? We obviously need our father!" He spat as if the tabby was a kit. The tabby blinked, then snarled back, "Fine. But you are coming with us. Lionstar will decide what to do with you."

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Fire and Thunder were hustled mercilessly back to camp. "What are we, hostages?" Thunder muttered crossly under her breath. Fire nudged her and whispered back, "Yeah. It seems that way." Thunder growled in slight anger. "Lionstar! We caught these two kits at our border," the brown-furred tabby cat meowed, dipping his head in respect as another larger and sleeker orange cat bounded down a high rock which jutted unexpectedly out of the ground at the center of the clearing.

He had an aura of authority around him, his posture radiating confidence. The other four cats who had 'captured' Thunder and her brother stepped back to reveal them. Lionstar's eyes glittered as he looked Thunder and Fire up and down. Then he shot a questioning look at his clan mates and another cat explained, "This one," he nodded towards Fire and he let out a soft growl, "said that they were with their father but got lost."

Another cat sniggered contemptuously, "Ha!" He let out a bitter snarl. "Would've got killed by now." The black she-cat beside him snorted in agreement, "Foolish flea-bags! At the rate they're going, their clan would be wiped out in a moon, no more!" Lionstar lashed his tail once. He growled lowly as a warning. "Quiet! We are not to talk ill about the other clans." The she-cat snarled softly, "But you know it's true."

Fire and Thunder, who had listened closely before, both stared at each other with identical horrified expressions on their faces. Fire's eyes narrowed suddenly and he spun around to face his captors. "Watch it. That's my father you are talking about. He won't be killed easily, you hear me?" Fire snarled, his voice trembling. His eyes flashed with anger.

"Come with me, kits. Warriors, you can rest now. Have some fresh-kill, there's a gathering tomorrow," Lionstar ordered and turned, padding to a well-hidden nest under the huge rock. Paw steps sounded behind them and Lionstar paused as he waited for the cat to catch up. "Lionstar! I heard about the kits... oh, hey there! I'm Cloudstorm, deputy of Thunderclan." Lionstar's tail twitched irritably. "Come on, then, Cloudstorm."

The four cats squeezed into the den and tried to make themselves comfortable. Lionstar curled his tail over his paws and started, "So, you say you came with your father?" Fire nodded confidently and replied, "Yes. And our brother too." Lionstar continued on. "Your father might have been killed by now. You see, there are four clans in the forest- Thunderclan, Shadowclan, Windclan and Riverclan. They are merciless, especially Windclan now that Lonestar had taken over. We-"

Fire snarled in annoyance and lashed his tail as he spat, "Why are

you even telling us this? It's not like we'll ever join you, these heartless mange-pelts!" With that he stalked out of the den, his expression bitter and sad. Thunder padded after him, her tail at his shoulder. "Calm down, Fire." She tried to soothe her brother but ended up unsuccessful. She herself was still trying to get over the fact that they're father was dead. Fire seemed to read her mind and stopped suddenly.

"Do not," He growled, "Think that Rock is dead. He isn't! He's a fighter!"

Thunder whimpered, never having seen her brother so angry before. She cowered and bowed her head, trying to make herself as small as possible. Fire's eyes softened as he licked her ear apologetically. "Sorry, Thunder. I'm just hurt that they would say such a thing." Thunder's heartbeat returned to normal as she realized that Fire was not angry anymore.

"What are we going to do now, Fire? We can't get out of here; the other cats will fight back. We can't go back to that twoleg place too, I'm scared of Lang. Can we stay here, please? Just for the time being until they find Rock?" Fire frowned at her sister, looking incredulously at her as if she was mad.

"Do you have bees in your brain, Thunder? These are the cats that captured us, Thunder. You want to stay with them?" Fire tail swiped in a circle, gesturing to the cats around him. "These-These flea-pelts who could kill us? Are you kidding me, Thunder?"

Thunder's tail drooped in disappointment and the light left in her eyes. She settled down and laid her head on her paws. "I'm sorry, Fire. I wasn't thinking. So where do we go now? It's almost dawn already." Fire looked around them- long shadows stretched everywhere, creeping silently towards them. Thunder was right.

Fire sighed. "Hey... you haven't told me your name yet!" Cloudstorm meowed as he padded over to them. Then he blinked, as if he had just realized something. "Oh well, since it's going to be dark soon, why don't you stay for the night? Maybe we can teach you some defense moves so that when you leave-" Fire rounded on him with a hostile snarl as he bared his teeth in disgust. "I am not going to stay

so get that into you thick head you stupid furball!"

Thunder's tail tip twitched in annoyance as she finally got up and spat, "Fire, why can't you understand? These cats aren't dangerous unless you provoke them! Can't you see they aren't going to hurt us? We can't go anywhere now! Why can't we just stay?" Fire's eyes widened at his sister's outburst. Then he growled and spun around. Stomping to the entrance of the camp, he left with an angry swish of his tail.

"Since you like it there so much, why don't you just stay?" Fire thought, hurt. How could she say that? Maybe she had not cared about him after all. She only thought about herself, didn't she? Fire was getting angrier by the minute. His mind was not on where he was going, and by the time he scented the other cats, it was too late.

"What are you doing in our territory?" A low growl erupted from his throat after he asked that question. Before Fire could even move a muscle, the cat screeched and the cats beside him yowled and flung themselves onto Fire. His mouth opened to speak but suddenly a large gray tabby leaped at him and clawed his shoulder. Stop! He wanted to scream. But the pain was too great, and he kept his jaw and eyes shut tight.

Sharp pain pierced his shoulder; he let out a whimper as pain swamped him. He swiped his paws feebly in front of him but the pain was blinding. The cats were all over him. His lungs were screaming for air. Get off me! He thought desperately, clawing blindly in the air. Someone scratched his nose, leaving a stinging, burning sensation behind. It felt as if someone was shoving daggers into him. He clenched his jaw in pain.

Suddenly, the weight of the other cats was lifted on him and he could breathe again. He heaved in great breaths of air, but he had lost too much blood. Fire was exhausted. He could faintly hear someone calling out to him. His weak reply was a soft, tired sigh, "I just want to sleep..."

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# Chapter 2

[image]

~Thunder

Chapter 2

Thunder could not believe that they had already forgotten about their father. Firepaw owed his life to Cloudstorm for saving him from Windclan, and therefore decided to stay in the clan. Only three sunrises had passed and they had already made new friends. Most of the apprentices made some rude remarks about them but they figured that it would stop eventually. Fire would always be by Thunder's side to snarl at the apprentices, and for that, Thunder was grateful.

Wolfpaw, a newly made apprentice, would always tease Thunder about them not having a permanent place in Thunderclan. Fire was always hanging around in the medicine cat's den, sticking his nose in the leap wraps and asking Amberleaf, the medicine cat, about everything.

"Let every cat old enough to catch their own prey stand beneath the high rock for a clan meeting!" Lionstar's voice reverberated throughout the camp.

Before long, every cat had gathered around him and Thunder watched curiously from the nursery. "What's happening?" She asked Featherflame nervously. "Are we going to get kicked out? Can we stay? Will Lionstar-" She rambled on, panicking slightly. Featherflame chuckled cheerfully and nuzzled her ear fondly. "No, Thunder. Quick, make yourself presentable. Fire! Do the same!"

Thunder swallowed anxiously and stared at Featherflame in confusion. "Why?" Featherflame just smiled and cocked her head to one side, waiting. Thunder shrugged and started licking her chest fur. Fire followed suit. They barely had enough time to prepare themselves when Lionstar spoke.

"Bluefang, you are an intelligent and loyal warrior," Lionstar meowed. "I know that you will do your best to pass on these qualities to Thunder." Bluefang rose to her paws, her eyes shining. "I'll do my best, Lionstar," she promised, beaming with pride. Thunder was pushed forward to stand under the high rock. Lionstar leaped down and looked at her warmly.

"Thunder," the clan leader meowed, "Do you accept the post of apprentice to Bluefang?" Thunder did not hesitate to breathe out a yes. "Then from this moment on you shall be known as Thunderpaw." Thunderpaw scampered over to Bluefang and touched noses with her. "Thank you!" She cried gratefully. Bluefang smiled, "For what?" Thunderpaw replied, "Most cats wouldn't want to be my mentor..."

"Oh, Thunderpaw! You have the potential to be a skillful warrior! I am honored to be your mentor. Trust me."

Thunderpaw gave a happy bounce on her paws as her clan mates called out, "Thunderpaw! Thunderpaw!" Then she settled down beside her mentor and looked over to her brother. Compared to how unwilling he was to settle in the clan, he looked a lot happier and more so excited that he could burst now.

"Eaglewing! You are a strong and dedicated warrior. I trust you to pass on these qualities to Fire," Lionstar meowed. Eaglewing's eyes shone with pride. "I will, Lionstar!" She promised. Fire scampered over to the high rock. Lionstar continued, "Fire, do you accept to be Eaglewing's apprentice?" Fire's chest puffed out and he meowed, "Yes!" Lionstar raised his head, "Then from now on you shall be known as Firepaw."

"Firepaw! Firepaw!" His clan mates cried as he touched noses with his mentor. Out of the corner of his eye,Firepaw noticed Amberleaf's eyes dull and her tail fall to the ground. She retreated into her den with a sense of defeat. What was wrong with her?

When the ceremony was over, the siblings bounded to Lionstar and chorused gratefully, "Thank you, Lionstar!" Lionstar smiled broadly, his eyes glowing. There was a questioning glint in his eyes that Thunderpaw did not miss. "For letting us stay in the clan, to be an

apprentice. You are the best, Lionstar!" She explained.

Lionstar replied, "You have potential to be great warriors. Any cat would be a fool not to see that. Starclan must really be feeling generous when they sent you to us!" Thunderpaw frowned. "What's Starclan?" She mewed. Firepaw looked just as clueless. Lionstar waved his tail to his den behind the high rock. They entered and settled down comfortably.

"Starclan are basically our ancestors, from all clans. In Starclan, there are no battles, prey will never run out, and it will never be dark there. It's all rainbows and sunshine. That's how we know our clan mates will be happy there."

Thunderpaw breathed out an excited 'wow'. Firepaw looked surprised that such a place even existed. "I want to visit that place! Will I go there someday?" Thunderpaw squealed. Lionstar's eyes darkened slightly, but he covered it up with a laugh. "Of course, if you behave. Some cats that disobey the warrior code will end up in the Place of No Stars. If you go to the elders, they can tell you some stories."

Thunderpaw shuddered at the name. Place of No Stars? What a creepy name! Firepaw looked as if he was deep in thought. Then Thunderpaw thanked Lionstar and nudged Firepaw. "Come on! I wanna hear some stories! Bye, Lionstar!"

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As the two lively apprentices bounded away to the elder's den, Lionstar wondered whether he had done a mistake by bringing them into the clan. Remembering the dream from the night before, he growled lowly. Spottedleaf had come to see him, her eyes wide and distraught as she muttered the words of the prophecy.

*"Four will rise in a sea of red, the wolf will cry, a guardian will fall. Thunder will strike and fire will burn. Dread the darkness as the waters churn."*

Lionstar had consulted in his medicine cat, Amberleaf, and she had the same dream when she visited the moon rock a few sunrises ago.

"Yellowfang had told me to beware of the two cats who might lead to the destruction on Thunderclan, but she did not specify who. But I did get a glimpse of two kits growing bigger and fiercer until they were like lions! Then a wave of blood swept over them and I woke up. What is happening, Lionstar? Is Thunderclan in danger?" Amberleaf had said.

Lionstar could only shrug then. "I didn't get a vision, but Spottedleaf did tell me this..." He recited the words of the prophecy and Amberleaf's eyes grew darker at each phrase. Her tail was stiff as she stood up and mewed, "Don't you think this is getting weird? I mean, three sunrises ago two kits were captured into the camp. Do you think...?"

Her question trailed off. Lionstar shared a horrified glance with his medicine cat. The question was clear; the answer was not.

*Could Thunderpaw and Firepaw lead to the destruction of Thunderclan?*

# Chapter 3

[image]

~Wolfpaw

Chapter 3

"I'm going to show you around Thunderclan territory. Remember to stay with me at all times, okay?" Bluefang ordered sternly. Thunderpaw nodded eagerly. "Can Firepaw come too?" She asked pleadingly. Her paws scuffled the ground excitedly as she begged once more, "Please, please, please? Pretty, pretty please with fresh-kill on top?" Bluefang gave in. "Fine," She caved.

Thunderpaw let out a squeal. "Thank you!" Bluefang looked annoyed that she was not immune to Thunderpaw's extremely cute looks. Thunderpaw raced to find her brother in the apprentices' den. The lazy furball was still sleeping. "Firepaw!" She hissed quietly. Her brother let out a groan and rolled over sleepily. Thunderpaw gave his shoulder a shake so hard he nearly rolled out of his nest.

His eyes popped open in surprise and he yowled out, "I'm awake! I'm awake!" Thunderpaw's eyes widened and her eyes narrowed again as her ears flattened and she shushed, "Quiet! They are still sleeping!" Her tail pointed to the other snoring apprentices. Her brother stared at her in confusion. "So why aren't you?"

Thunderpaw snorted disbelievingly as she led her brother to where her mentor was chatting with Eaglewing. "Excuse me? We are apprentices now! We are supposed to explore the territory today, you stupid furball!" Thunderpaw chided, annoyed that her brother had forgotten. His eyes brightened as she finished, then darkened as a flash of longing lit up in his eyes.

"What? Aren't you excited?"

"I am! I mean, I am, but I'm just a bit tired..." Firepaw rushed out with wide eyes. Thunderpaw's eyes narrowed. "Are you-" She began,

but was cut off by an impatient meow. "Are you two going to stand there all day?" Eaglewing's meow cut through the silent clearing like a clap of thunder in the middle of the night. The two apprentices dashed towards their respective mentors and apologized sincerely.

"I'm sorry, Eaglewing. There's just so much to talk about now..." Firepaw explained. His mentor's eyes softened a little. "I understand, but now I must show you around first. There will be plenty of time for chit-chat later, okay?" Eaglewing promised. Firepaw nodded enthusiastically, "Then let's go!"

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"I'm really, really tired," Thunderpaw mumbled around a mouthful of fresh-kill. "Squirrels are so hard to catch! I saw like three of them but only barely managed to catch the last one. Why can't they move slower?" Thunderpaw complained with a thump of her tail. Firepaw nodded in agreement as he gulped down his vole.Then he stretched and yawned, revealing sharp, white teeth.

"Hey, Thunderpaw! What did you catch today?" A low sneer sounded at her ear. Firepaw glared at the other apprentice. "Stay away from my sister!" He spat acidly. Wolfpaw growled and lashed his tail in annoyance. "You can't tell me what to do, kitty pet!" Firepaw's ears flattened in anger. His neck fur bristled. He took a menacing step towards the older apprentice. Thunderpaw whimpered.

"What. Did. You. Call. Me?"

Wolfpaw was undaunted. "A kitty pet, you flea-pelt. You are a disgrace to Thunderclan! You will destroy Thunderclan someday. See, even Starclan doesn't trust you!" He sneered softly, his green eyes glowing. His teeth were bared threateningly, his claws unsheathed. Firepaw growled back, "Lying mange-pelt!" Thunderpaw looked on with wide eyes, but she did not say anything.

"Wolfpaw, Thunderpaw, Firepaw! In my den, now!" Lionstar ordered with a swish of his tail. His eyes were narrowed, his fur

bristling slightly. The three apprentices stared at each other in horror, and Wolfpaw looked particularly guilty.The tension built up in the air around them, and by the time they were comfortably settled in their leader's den, it was getting almost hard to breathe.

For a moment, no one uttered a word. Then Lionstar broke the unsettling silence by glaring suspiciously at Wolfpaw. "Wolfpaw, why did you call your clanmates that? And why did you mention Starclan? Did you have a dream?" Wolfpaw's eyes were wide as saucers, and his tongue felt heavy as lead. He couldn't manage an answer.

"Wolfpaw!" Lionstar snapped angrily, his eyes flashing.

"Y-yes, Lionstar!" He stuttered in surprise, blinking nervously. He refused to meet his clan leader's piercing gaze. He could feel Lionstar, Thunderpaw and Firepaw's eyes burning holes into his pelt. Stop looking at me, he wanted to yowl. But he kept silent, swallowing the bile in his throat. He couldn't know! Oh, me and my big mouth. Why did I ever taunt Firepaw?

"Wolfpaw, did you hear me? This is serious! Do you understand?" Lionstar's voice was harsh, on the edge. His fur was bristling slightly, his eyes staring at Wolfpaw anxiously. Why wasn't he answering? Does he know something I don't? Wolfpaw whimpered and bowed his head. "I'm sorry, Lionstar!" He finally whispered.

"I didn't have a dream, but I heard you and Amberleaf talking in the den, so I-I eavesdropped. I heard you say two cats, that are obviously Thunderpaw and-" Lionstar let out a snarl and Wolfpaw cowered, letting out a frightened yelp. "Do not throw about these illogical accusations at your clanmates unless you have concrete proof. How would you like Thunderpaw and Firepaw calling you a kitty pet, or being cursed by Starclan?"

Wolfpaw's eyes widened in remorse as he stammered out, "I-I-I-" Lionstar growled, his eyes gleaming meaningfully. "These cats have already lost their parents; they don't need another mouse-brain taunting them like that. Understand, Wolfpaw? And do not ever eavesdrop again. Too much knowledge isn't always the best. And let the words that we said in this den, stay here. Have I made myself

clear, Wolfpaw?"

The apprentice lowered his head and nodded. Then he scrambled out the den quickly, not meeting any cat's eyes. Lionstar stared after Wolfpaw. That cat might be a great warrior, but what use is he if he keeps saying all these rumors about everyone? He might be the one leading to Thunderclan's downfall. But the prophecy had mentioned strangers...and Wolfpaw isn't a stranger. Is he?

He shook his head to clear his thoughts, and then turned to the two cats. "Firepaw, Thunderpaw. I apologize to you on Wolfpaw's behalf. He should not have called you names, please forgive him. I hate fighting in my clan. If he provokes you one more time, you must tell me, and I will have a word with him." Thunderpaw nodded gratefully while Firepaw just scowled.

"Fine!" He replied and stalked out the den.

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Eaglewing shook her head and repeated, "No, Firepaw, its crouch, move forward, and pounce! Not crouch and pounce!" Firepaw growled in annoyance and dropped to his haunches again. He glared at the bundle of leaves a few feet away and put a paw in front of the other, and then when he felt that he was close enough, he leaped and landed squarely on the leaves, which he tore apart with his claws.

"Firepaw! Calm down! You did it right." "I can't do this! I can't hunt properly, fight properly. I can't even drop into the correct crouch! I'm such a failure! Maybe Wolfpaw was right after all! Starclan hates me!" Firepaw cried out unhappily as he put his head on his paws and sniffed. "I'm sorry, Eaglewing. You have been such a great mentor; any apprentice would be honored to have you. But I..." Firepaw trailed off as his tail thumped the ground sadly.

"I can't be a warrior. I'm not meant to be one." Eaglewing felt a pang. Am I such a failure? She wondered. As if he had read her mind, Firepaw's eyes widened and he nuzzled Eaglewing. "No! You are a great mentor! Trust me, take another apprentice. He'll be the best warrior in Thunderclan!" Eaglewing smiled forlornly and licked

Firepaw's ear fondly. "Thank you, Firepaw. I'll talk to Lionstar about this, don't you worry. All right?"

Firepaw's eyes brightened and he leaped into the air and yowled, "Yes! Thank you so much Eaglewing! You are awesome!" Eaglewing smiled weakly and sighed. Her eyes shone wistfully as she led Firepaw back to the camp. His spirits were high; hers were lower than the ground.

How did this happen? And I thought he was going to be the best warrior ever. I'm sorry, Firepaw. I won't take another apprentice. I'm not mentor material. How could I make an apprentice lose interest in being a warrior?

# Chapter 4

[image]

~Eaglewing

Chapter 4:

Eaglewing shook her head firmly. She glared at the cat before her and replied, "No, I can't! Can't you see? I'm a failure; I'm not good at mentoring. Please, Lionstar!" Her clan leader sighed in exasperation. Eaglewing was a great warrior- one of the best in Thunderclan. How could she not realize that?

Eaglewing dipped her head. "Lionstar, if you don't believe me, then give me another apprentice. If he gives up too, so will I." Lionstar nodded eagerly. Standing up, he licked Eaglewing's face affectionately. "He won't give up!" He promised, his pelt brushing hers as he exited the den. Eaglewing could not suppress a purr and stared in embarrassment at the ground. Well...that was flattering.

*What was that? Does Lionstar like me the way I like him? Oh, Lionstar! Please tell me that you do*!

Eaglewing realized that she was still sitting in Lionstar's den, and she quickly got onto her paws and padded out. *Stop behaving like a kit*, she scolded herself. Her pelt was still tingling. Lionstar had never treated her that way before. Or maybe he did, and she just never noticed. *Lionstar! You are driving me crazy!* Eaglewing let out a frustrated sigh.

"And why is that?"

Eaglewing let out a squeal. "Lionstar! I-I-I-" She stammered, her pelt hot with embarrassment. Lionstar's eyes fixed her with an intense gaze. "You-you-you what?" He mocked playfully, his eyes twinkling with mock anger as he joked, "What, cat got your tongue?" Eaglewing scowled. "No! I just- Spoke my thoughts out loud..."

Lionstar frowned, but the playful glint in his eyes had not left. "Really, Eaglewing. What did I do? Did I upset you?" Lionstar seemed really concerned. Eaglewing shook her head vigorously. "No, Lionstar. You did nothing of that sort." In fact, it was the opposite. *Now I'm getting mixed messages and feelings about you.* Eaglewing scowled and shook her head to clear her thoughts.

*This is crazy....I shouldn't be attracted to him. He shouldn't be attracted to me. He won't like me, it isn't possible, I...*

"A fresh-kill for your thoughts, Eaglewing?" Lionstar's amused voice broke her train of thoughts. Eaglewing felt her face heat up again. "Sorry," she muttered in embarrassment. Why was she getting so embarrassed? Lionstar was her clan leader! Nothing more! Lionstar glanced at the entrance to the camp and frowned at something.

"Eaglewing, I have to go...I enjoyed talking to you, will you meet me in my den after sun down? I need to talk to you about something. You will be excused from warrior duties tomorrow. I need you to do something else." Lionstar's gaze was questioning. Eaglewing wondered what Lionstar was going to ask her to do. "Please? Just listen to me, if you still disagree to it then..." Lionstar's gaze was averted and he stared at the ground, "Then you can go. I won't force you."

Eaglewing considered it. What was it? Curiosity burned within her. "Fine," She agreed as she spotted Cloudstorm, the clan deputy, padding over with a disturbed look in his eyes. Lionstar brightened and he smiled, "Thank you, Eaglewing." He left, padding towards Blackfoot, but not before sending her an adoring glance and licked her ear. Eaglewing felt warm in her heart.

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Thunderpaw leaped into the air and lashed out with her front paws, as if attacking an invisible enemy. As she fell back down, she rolled sideways as she tried to dodge the invisible cat. Thunderpaw panted in exhaustion. Her mentor stares at her in awe. "Woah, you really are a fast learner, Thunderpaw." Thunderpaw grinned widely and her eyes shined. "Really? Thank you!"
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Bluefang shook her head. "You are way faster than the other apprentices. I think... there are just a few more stuff we need to learn, and at this pace you can become a warrior by the end of this moon." Thunderpaw let out a squeal. Bouncing on her paws in excitement, she gasped out, "Really? You aren't kidding?"

Seeing her apprentice so excited, Bluefang was also affected. Licking her ear affectionately, Bluefang smiled. "Yes, Thunderpaw. Lionstar would be so proud of you!" Thunderpaw beamed. Then realisation struck her like a blow to her head. Her eyes dulled slightly as she murmured unhappily, "What about Firepaw?" Bluefang laid the tip of her tail on Thunderpaw's shoulder. "Don't worry so much, young warrior. Lionstar will take care of that."

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Firepaw was sick of doing apprentice duties all day; he was no one's apprentice. He helped out regularly at the medicine cat store, but fetching fresh moss and removing ticks of the elders wasn't exactly his idea of fun. Firepaw plodded back into the medicine cat's den with a mouthful of moss.

"Thanks, Firepaw. Do you want to help me sort out these herbs? Just put the-" Amberleaf began but Firepaw snarled furiously at her. "Why are you telling me this? It's not like I'm going to be your apprentice!" Guilt washed over him as he saw the flash of hurt in Amberleaf's eyes. She stared at Firepaw, unable to mask the sadness swirling in the depths of her bright blue eyes.

Firepaw's eyes widened as he realised what he said. "I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean-" Amberleaf cut him off with a soft, disheartened sigh. "I get it, Firepaw. You don't want to be a medicine cat. But did you have to be so harsh?" Amberleaf's eyes were dull, her tail trailing limply on the ground as turned and padded away.

"Oh no! What have I done?" Firepaw wondered anxiously as he stared at Amberleaf's retreating back.

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Lionstar snarled at no one in particular as he leapt up from his bed

of moss. Shaking himself roughly, he flinched as he remembered the dream he had last night. No, no, no... this could not be happening. He knew who the four cats were- but he could not believe it. He didn't even know the last two cats. See? Now he was talking nonsense. He knew, but he did not?

Lionstar pushed back his frustration. Anger would get him nowhere. He had to go to the moon rock. The sooner, the better. Rising up from his bed, he took a deep breath to calm his frantically beating heart. He had so many questions. He needed his medicine cat for some; but the others, he had already solved.

When did his clan become the heart of so many dangers?

When did he have so many problems?

These questions, he knew the answer.

And the answer was the two newest additions to the clan.

And he thought he had a solution; simple, but heartbreaking. He never thought he'd do such a thing. "What kind of clan leader am I?" He asked himself forlornly as he padded, with heavy footsteps, to Amberleaf's den. "What kind of monster have I become?"

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# Chapter 5

[image]

~Lionstar

Chapter 5

"We have no other choice!" Lionstar snarled, his teeth bared as he lashed his tail in frustration. Eaglewing had grown quite close to the young cats in the last few days. He knew it would have been hard to convince her. "We do!" Eaglewing spat back at him, her eyes full of disgust. He wasn't surprised. He was disgusted at himself too. But the fact that this cat he was talking to, the one he had feelings for, was looking at him like that, it just made him want to yowl his pain and hurt to Starclan.

"Well, you're the smart one! Tell me then, what should we do? What can we do?" Lionstar growled. His eyes burned with fury. He was the clan leader. Eaglewing should listen to him! Eaglewing glared back at him with hate in her eyes. "We can let them stay! You can't just kick them out like that! Great Starclan, Lionstar, they're just kits! Kits! Especially Firepaw. He didn't even learn anything! Not even the hunter's crouch! How do you expect them to survive? Out there on their own? How could you be so cold hearted? So-"

"Enough!" Lionstar roared, leaping up from his previous position. He was already in a bad mood. He didn't need his favourite cat to tell him how heartless he was, how evil, how irresponsible. He growled, his head spinning, prowling around Eaglewing. He could smell fear rolling off her in waves. But he was too irritated, too tired to really care.

He had had enough. Enough of all those nightmares, of all those prophecies where someone would undoubtedly get hurt in the end. He had had enough of every single thing. And he was dying to pour his heart out to someone. Someone he cared for. He stopped pacing and couldn't resist the urge to pounce on Eaglewing, his mouth close to her ear.

Taking in deep breaths, he whispered hoarsely, "You don't understand the pain from being a clan leader, do you? You don't understand," Lionstar paused, his voice softening to a wistful murmur, "how hard, it is for me, to be a clan leader. You don't understand the pain I felt when I made the choice to send Thunderpaw and Firepaw away. You don't understand the extends I have to go through as clan leader to save the clan that I love. You don't understand that I had to give up my crush to avoid getting distracted in such a time. You don't understand how it is like to be a clan leader!"

Lionstar's voice cracked at the end as he shut his eyes and inhaled Eaglewing's calming scent. You don't understand that the cat I love is you. With that last thought, he gave Eaglewing a cold glance and got off her, immediately wishing he had not done so. He missed the warmth of her fur. Staring blankly ahead, he padded emotionlessly back to the camp. He lost it- in front of Eaglewing. Great Starclan! Now he had lost his chance. He will never be able to get Eaglewing back.

Eaglewing would hate him forever. Especially after what he was about to do.

~~~

Eaglewing couldn't believe it. She couldn't believe what just happened; couldn't believe that Lionstar was actually that heartless. It was like a repeat of Brokenstar's reign. She had heard the story, and it was so sick it was engrained in her mind forever. Eaglewing's breath hitched as she envisioned Lionstar on the high rock, bloodied and hostile. No. That wasn't going to happen. She knew she could not let Lionstar get away with sending the kits off.

Then she realised- that was exactly what he could be doing right now. "No!" She yowled in horror as she darted back to the camp. She could hear noises in the camp getting louder as she neared the entrance; yet she didn't slow down. No, no, no... she could see the outlines of two small kits standing in front of the high rock. Lionstar was addressing the clan. She sat down next to Featherflame just as he began.
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"Thunderclan. There is something I have to tell you. It is not pleasant, but this is for your own good." Lionstar's eyes pierced into Eaglewing's horrified brown ones as he put on his best poker face. Eaglewing's eyes widened. This was it. This... was exactly what she had not hoped for. Thunderpaw and Firepaw, they were just kits! She exchanged an anxious glance with Amberleaf, knowing that Lionstar had told her about his decision too.

"Thunderpaw, Firepaw. I am sorry to tell you this, but from this moment on, you will be banished from this clan. If you ever set foot on-" Lionstar's speech was broken abruptly by Eaglewing. Murmurs of shock and horror greeted her. "With all my respect, Lionstar, I reject your suggestion-" Her clan leader cut her off. "It was not a suggestion, Eaglewing. It was an order. And I suggest that you listen to it." Eaglewing snarled, hackles rose in defiance. Thunderpaw and Firepaw knew what she was doing. "No, Eaglewing! Don't fight for us; we are not worth it," Thunderpaw pleaded, her eyes full of hurt and disbelief. This cat, Lionstar, the one who introduced her to Thunderclan not long ago, was the exact same one who was banishing her now.

Firepaw was furious, his fur bristling until he looked twice his size. "You are pathetic, Lionstar. You are not fitted to be a clan leader. It was a bet wasn't it? You must have been working with Wolfpaw. He always wanted us banished. I don't know what he did to you. You were great, Lionstar. I once looked up to you. I thought- I thought you were the greatest cat ever. I guess I should banish that thought now, shouldn't I?" He didn't wait for a reply. He just stalked towards the entrance, not looking back.

Thunderpaw shot Wolfpaw one last glance; it was so full of hurt and hate that he cowered and couldn't even try to defend himself. "I hate you!" She cried. She let out a yowl, full of the pain she felt. It was the worst thing that Lionstar had to endure. He had done this. He had made her like that. "Great Starclan! What have I done to make you hate me so much? What have I done?"

No one replied, and she shot Eaglewing a face of panic and hatred. It was as if she didn't know who she was anymore. Eaglewing snarled at Lionstar as Thunderpaw backed away to the entrance of the camp. She growled at the clan cats, and then fled the territory.

"I warned you, Lionstar! I hate you!" She screeched furiously. Lionstar really was not who she thought he was. Appearances could be deceiving.

"I leave this clan officially. And you will have no say in this, Lionstar. Just like Thunderpaw and Firepaw had no say in their exile. You didn't even tell them the reason! How could you?" Eaglewing snarled bitterly. She exited the camp with a lash of her tail, chasing after the two kits. If they were hurt... she swore, she would kill Lionstar, clan leader or not.

She couldn't believe she once liked a cat so despicable.

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# Chapter 6

[image]

~Tigerstar

Chapter 6

Thunderpaw chased after her brother with anger bubbling beneath her calm exterior. She could still remember the look in Wolfpaw's eyes- shocked and furious- and even... sadness? No, she must be wrong. Why would he be sad? Maybe he liked her too. Maybe he did... just a little. Thunderpaw growled, annoyed at herself. This was all her imagination. Nothing really happened. Thunderpaw huffed angrily. She didn't like the way her thoughts were straying.

*I will not think about him.*

*He is not worth my time.*

*Right now I have to find Firepaw-*

"Great Starclan..." Thunderpaw's fur bristled in horror. She was so caught up in her thoughts that she had stopped chasing her brother. With eyes wide as saucers, she stared straight ahead, her tail stiff and straight. Where was she? She had set her foot on unfamiliar territory that was not Thunderclan. She took in a deep breath, and a strong, unfamiliar scent invaded her nose.

It smelled of plains and fresh grass.

Thunderpaw let out a horrified whimper as she backed away from the land. Twigs and leaves crumpled beneath her paws. Great Starclan, I am in Windclan territory.

--

Lionstar's eyes were wide with shock, his mouth agape as he stared at the mass of bodies flooding the clearing. What was this? Cats were slashing, clawing and screeching, yet no sound was heard. He

could recognize most of them. Thunderclan cats were dying, ambushed by Windclan and Riverclan cats. He blinked, wishing that it could go away. He knew it was all a bad dream, since he couldn't recall coming to this place at all.

He was in unknown territory. Lionstar growled with unease as he unsheathed his claws, feeling the branch beneath his feet sway ever so slightly. As he sat, muscles tensed, on the high tree branch, he could smell nothing but mist, since the fog was already moving away.

In a whirl of white smoke, a cat materialized before him, muscles rippling under his sleek, striped brown pelt. Lionstar flinched as the lean, muscular cat padded slowly, haughtily in the air, striding over to sit beside him. His whiskers twitched as his mouth lifted slightly into a taunting smirk. His head was held high and proud, his eyes glittering. Lionstar was afraid of this cat. Who wouldn't be? He was notorious; he was every kit's nightmare.

*He was Tigerstar.*

"You see this, Lionstar?" He growled as he nodded at the bloodied cats. Lionstar did not reply. He was not so scared as much as he was worried. This was his clan, dying. Snarling with barely suppressed anger, Lionstar leapt, without warning, onto the other cat. He was furious. His mind was swirling with violent thoughts of killing his grandfather.

"What are you doing to my clan?" He snarled, front lip curled up to reveal sharp, slightly yellowed teeth. His amber eyes burned.

Tigerstar pushed him off effortlessly. He let out a chuckle as if to say, 'what happened to you, Lionstar? I thought you were better than this.' Lionstar's tail lashed aggressively. "Answer me, you fool!" He commanded, his eyes alight with fury. Tigerstar chuckled once again. He shook his head as he sighed mockingly, "Lionstar, my dear grandson-" Lionstar growled at that as his eyes narrowed. Tigerstar was not the least bit daunted.

"This," He swiped his tail to point at the cats, "Is what will happen to your clan." Before Lionstar could object, Tigerstar continued, "But

I have a way," He paused for the full effect, "to solve it!" He smirked, his claws unsheathing as he asked, mockingly polite, "Do you want to hear it?" Lionstar ignored the fighting cats, knowing that they were just a distraction to get him angry and impulsive. Tigerstar had not managed to trick his parents- and he was going to continue that cycle.

"Do I want to hear it?" Lionstar pretended to think, his eyes narrowed till they were only thin slits. He faked a bright smile and replied, "Of course!" Tigerstar grinned back, his eyes glittering, as if he knew that Lionstar would agree. He started, "Lionstar, grandson. You can-" Lionstar let out an eerily cold, mocking laugh.

"In your dreams, you fool. Your so called 'ideas' are full of shit. Ha! Like I would agree to you, Tigerstar," Lionstar spat acidly, his tail swishing in agitation. Tigerstar could barely believe his ears. Lionstar was rejecting his offer to help? His eyes glowed with fury. Fur bristling, Tigerstar let out a chilling yowl, a deafening battle cry, and wisps of smoke rose from the dark, damp ground.

Lionstar realised that he was not on the thin, creaky branch that miraculously held his weight before. No, now he was standing on damp, muddy ground. The area had darkened considerably around him, swathing him in a blanket of darkness. Lionstar could not prevent his pelt from bristling; he was truly scared- who knew what Tigerstar would do?

"Well, Lionstar."

Lionstar remained silent; what could he say? *Hello?*

"Someone's scared," Tigerstar sneered, his eyes narrowing with disgust as he stared at his grandson. Lionstar bit back his angry retort. No, he will not get into a fight with this vicious, pathetic excuse for a cat. They glared at each other, each cat's eyes glowing brighter as anger built up in them.

"Do not test my patience, Lionstar. *Speak*!"

Lionstar sneered, yet he remained, stubbornly, silent. This dream was getting more terrifying by the second. He had heard, from the

elders, that some dreams took place in the Place of No Stars. Was he here?

"You will regret this, Lionstar. I swear, I will make you suffer. I will make your clan pay! Just wait, and see darkness spread. Oh yes, soon Starclan will vanish. And all of you will perish together!" Tigerstar spat, his eyes gleaming with madness as he let out a terrifying screech. His words caused Lionstar's fur to bristle, with fear or horror, or even both, he didn't know.

*"Rise, my warriors. Rise, Daemons!"*

Lionstar's feet seemed to have frozen, not a single muscle allowed to twitch. He wanted to run; he fought the urge, though, wanting to see what these strange beings, or 'Daemons', were. With his eyes drawn, affixed, to the spot in front of Tigerstar, he continued to stare. Where were the so-called 'Daemons'? Tigerstar seemed to have read his mind.

"Just wait, Lionstar. You will regret not accepting my offer!" Tigerstar let out a raspy, cruel laugh, and Lionstar snarled. "Do not threaten me, you fool. I will not let you win this!" Tigerstar sneered, his eyes narrowing with amusement. "Thunderclan will perish. So will you. And I will rule the world!" Tigerstar's eyes gleamed with unhidden madness, his head swung back to let out his eerie, booming chuckle.

"Look, grandson. My warriors have awoken."

Lionstar opened his mouth to reply, but his tongue was suddenly as heavy as lead, maybe even heavier. His eyes widened in astonishment, his fur crawled. His eyes were transfixed on the dark, fog-covered ground. His eyes had accustomed to the dark, yet he could not see what was causing the ground to rumble. The slow, slight rumble slowly showed its true colors. Soon, it turned into a full blast earthquake, the soil breaking beneath his feet.

Yet Lionstar was frozen. He couldn't move. Fear had taken over him.

He could now see, clear as day, why the ground was shaking so

violently.

His face twisted into a horrified expression, his eyes narrowing, his mouth half agape. Oh, great Starclan. What were these? But he knew. He was sure that his eyes weren't playing tricks on him. And he was also quite sure that Tigerstar wasn't tricking him. This was real...

The dark, shadowy figures rising slowly from the ground were *paws*. Great, giant paws, filling the land. Everywhere he looked, a paw was growing, bigger and larger by the second. Soon, whole heads broke out from the soil. Bright, red eyes stared back at him, emotionless and cruel. How many were there? Great Starclan, Lionstar knew that these weren't ordinary vole-eating cats. No, these were huge, looming cats, and Lionstar found himself thinking that he didn't want to know what their diet was.

"Still not giving in, Lionstar?" Tigerstar growled, tail lashing aggressively. Lionstar was too horrified to reply. And that was when the great cat pounced.

# Chapter 7

[image]

~Yakon

Chapter 7

She had to get out of here. She had to escape. No cat could find her. These thoughts were constantly crowding Thunderpaw's mind, and the panicky feeling she hated was hitting her head on, full force. Her fur bristled; something was wrong, she could feel it. Her eyes were wide, her ears perked, alert. The scent of damp ground invaded her sensitive nostrils. Her nose twitched.

The ground here was bone-dry.

Why was there such a smell? Thunderpaw took no risks. She had been with Thunderclan long enough, for Bluefang to tell her about the weakness of the other clans. Windclan cats could not climb, but they were fast and agile. Knowing this, Thunderpaw surveyed her surroundings with her sharp, keen eyes. Trees dotted the land, and she picked one, padding nervously over to it.

She took a step back, then leapt, claws unsheathing as she sank her claws into the trunk for support. Thunderpaw let out a breath that she had not realised she had been holding. Where was Firepaw? Was he safe? Did he sense the same unease that she felt? Suddenly, the direction of her thoughts changed, directing themselves to a certain gray, striped tom.

Thunderpaw let out a growl, and climbed quickly up the tree, settling on a branch high enough that she deemed safe. She shut her eyes, desperately craving sleep, yet the moment she did, his eyes glittered in her mind. "Stop thinking about him. He's a sneaky, stupid furball." Thunderpaw could feel herself getting nervous just by thinking about Wolfpaw. It couldn't be.

Thunderpaw shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut, willing the

concerned face of Wolfpaw out of her mind while leaving another thought float around in a dark corner. She couldn't be falling for Wolfpaw; she couldn't be.

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Wolfpaw let out a shrill yowl, leaping up from his bed of moss; yet another sleepless night. Moons had passed since Thunderpaw was banished from the clan. And since then, he did not get single night where he could get a good night's sleep. Moonpaw's annoyed voice reached his ears. "Will you quit it already, Wolfpaw?" Wolfpaw let out a snarl. Frustrated at himself, he shot an icy glare at Moonpaw; his mood was already dampened. "Shut up!" He sneered at the older apprentice. With that, he stalked out the apprentice's den. It was still dark; how long had he slept?

Wolfpaw needed to calm down. Why was he like this? Easily angered, and all those sleepless nights were not helping. He sighed and padded down the familiar path that led to the waterfall, his sanctuary, at the far side of the Thunderclan territory. His gray pelt shined under the glittering moonlight. Soon, he arrived at the foot of the lake. Water thundered down from the waterfall, shining as the moon shone on it. He stared in the pool of water that stretched out in front of him; he could see his reflection rippling across the water, and for a moment the reflection changed.

*"Father?"*

Wolfpaw stretched his paw to touch the reflection; but it changed again, and his paw stopped mid-air. Wolfpaw stared, confused, at the rippling illumination, his eyes narrowing as he saw a glowing, white ball in his paw. The moon? Wolfpaw reached out to try to feel the water; was it real? Was he really holding the moon? As his paw hit the water's surface, a great ripple suddenly turned into a churning mass of water.

Higher and higher it built up, wave after wave piled up on top of one another; it was as if there was something placed in front of it to prevent it all from cascading down. It rose a few meters higher than Wolfpaw, whose eyes were wide with fear.  Wolfpaw backed away from the huge wave, biting back his frightened yelps as drops of

ice-cold water splashed onto him.

Wolfpaw watched, amazed, as the water slowly transformed. He shivered unconsciously as his wet coat of fur stuck to his body like a second skin. Paws and feet grew, and the head started to emerge. The liquid monster opened its mouth as if to show off his large, watery canines. Wolfpaw was starting to hate his life. What was this? Was he going to die here? At his most trusted place; his sanctuary?

Wolfpaw growled, hackles rising aggressively, at the monstrous creature. "Who are you?" He snarled boldly, not expecting the creature to answer him at all. But it did, its voice hoarse and raspy, and his words were all thunderous growling. The rushing water from the waterfall did not help at all. His words were almost inaudible. Wolfpaw's jaw dropped, fur bristling, when he heard the creature's growl.

"Do not fear me, young one. I am a water spirit; you will know the truth soon. Beware the tiger, he will try to destroy you and the others. You have a destiny to fulfill, and you must save the clans. Search for the others- the fiery Thunder and the Guardians' wolf. Remember me, and I will help you when I can."

With that, the monster vanished in a swirl or gray-white mist, diving back into the deep waters where he belonged. Wolfpaw was dazed; was it a dream, was it real? He couldn't tell. Slightly put out by this unlikely entity, Wolfpaw decided to head back to camp. Should I tell Lionstar? He has a right to know. I wonder if this has to do with the prophecy that I overheard.

As Wolfpaw trudged wearily through the dense undergrowth, the bushes rustled as he brushed past. The wind seemed to whisper words of a strangely familiar prophecy, but Wolfpaw knew better than to believe them. The water spirit's voice seemed to echo in his head, the words spoken as if he was underwater.

*"Four will rise in a sea of red, the wolf will cry, a guardian will fall. Thunder will strike and fire will burn. Dread the darkness as the waters churn."*

*What? A guardian? Fire? Thunder? What was he saying?*

Another voice rang, deep and menacing, the words slamming into him like a sledgehammer blow to his head. His eyes turned blank as his mind swirled in a seemingly distant memory, his legs carrying him back to camp. He was here, in the real world, yet somehow he seemed further from there than any other cat.

*"Hear my cry as the guardians fall; see the darkness as it overwhelms all. Feel the Earth as it cracks and roars, taste the bitter-sweet poison of revenge."*

That voice. The terrible, terrible voice. I know him. I know this cat.

Wolfpaw let out a frightened yelp as the words swirled, faster and faster around in his head. They all seemed to click into place. "No!" He yowled, paws batting at his eyes. A memory replayed itself in his mind; his eyes burned blood red with the mark of the-

"No! I can't do this! I reject! No!" Wolfpaw let out a shattering scream, his mind throbbing under the stress weighed heavily down on him. They must have chosen wrong. A young apprentice like him shouldn't feel this kind of responsibility; this kind of stress. It wasn't healthy. The water spirit's cry sounded like an alarm in his ears. He whimpered, pawing at his ears as if to block out his voice.

It hurt. It hurt so much. It hurt... knowing that the survival of the clans was depending on him. It hurt, knowing that the mark could not be erased. Wolfpaw collapsed; his knees buckled and he slumped down onto the ground. "I can't do it. I'm sorry."

# Chapter 8

[image]

~Kougar

Chapter 8

Tigerstar let out a haughty chuckle as he met the eyes of the large, white cat.

"So Yakon," He sneered at the white furred cat, "What brings you here? Think you can defeat me?" Tigerstar was not the least bit daunted. Yakon sneered back. "Think I cannot? In your dreams, soulless piece of shit." Tigerstar snarled furiously at his blatant show of disrespect, but he did not comment.

"What do you want?" Tigerstar growled instead. Yakon let out a snort of humorless laughter. "You don't know?" Yakon smirked. His dark, beady eyes felt like they were glaring straight into Tigerstar's soul, if he even had one. Tigerstar grunted and relaxed his tense muscles as he sat down and sighed. "This is stupid. Just tell me what you want and leave." Yakon let out a roar of triumph.

"I will not leave until you accept my request."

"Then tell me."

"I want you to release Knightmare and capture Kougar."

Tigerstar's head snapped up to face Yakon, his face paling with sudden fear. What? Snarling, Tigerstar stalked towards Yakon and curled his lips to reveal sharp, yellow fangs. "Are you crazy, Yakon? I knew you were evil but this? This is just-" Yakon sniffed, "I knew it. You were always cowardly, Tigerstar. No wonder Mother banished you."

"It isn't my fault!" Tigerstar snarled, almost blurting out the truth to his distrusting brother. "You even changed your name," Yakon

observed with displeasure. The evil had won then. But I captured Knightmare in the end. Kougar was my savior. I will never hurt her in any way. Yakon was glaring at him with such a fierce stare that Tigerstar had to avoid his eyes.

"Kougar is a coward too. She is on my side now, you know. I told her that she will regret it if she disobeys me. Guess what? She-" Tigerstar cut him off with a sharp growl. "Rejected you. Shut your jaws, Yakon. I will never succumb to the evil like you and your minions did. You are the true cowards. Now get out, leave, and never come back."

Tigerstar summoned his daemons as he padded back to his home, and they chased his brother out.

I never want to see him again.

--

Thunderpaw was still up in her tree. Not knowing where to go, she curled up in a high branch which she was sure was able to support her weight, then relaxed and fell into a restless sleep.

--

Thunderpaw wasn't exactly sure what woke her; a sound perhaps, or the sliver of light previously filtered through the leaves being momentarily blocked, or maybe it was simply an instinct for survival that dragged her from sleep. Whatever caused it, she was alert and tense when she blinked her eyes open and spotted the dark shape above her. Someone stood on the branch above her, a huge, white cat.

It loomed over her like death.

The thought had barely formed in her mind when the huge shape flashed out a paw, claws unsheathed. Recognizing the action from her warrior training, Thunderpaw ducked instinctively, and reared back on her hind paws for a counter attack. She forgot, for a moment, that she was not on the ground. Perched precariously on the edge of the branch, Thunderpaw managed a clumsy swipe and

fell backward.

"Four will rise in a sea of red, the wolf will cry, a guardian will fall. Thunder will strike and fire will burn. Dread the darkness as the waters churn."

The wind whispered mysteriously into her ear as she tumbled down, down to the dark abyss below. Whispers swam in her mind, speaking unintelligible words as she shook her head and yowled. She couldn't even hear it, her thoughts and words drowning in the onslaught of whispers, roars and snarls.

"No!" Thunderpaw let out a shriek as she landed on the ground below. She was confused, and could swear that there was no abyss below the branch when she climbed that tree. She dusted herself off, fur bristling with terror as she raised her hackles aggressively. The horrible noise stopped. Snarling at the dark space, she swiped out a paw and yelped as it met with flesh. Warm, wet blood clung to her claws as she growled and retreated.

It was dark. Too dark.

She couldn't see a thing. Not even her own paws.

"Are you scared now, Thunder?"

The voice, deep and menacing, resounded throughout the once silent place. Icy chills crawled up Thunderpaw's spine. It was like a dark, moonless cage; a prison to trap her in. She could feel her heartbeat thudding so wildly she could feel it down to her trembling legs. She continued the low growl in her throat. Oh, Firepaw, where are you?

"Do you ever wonder, Thunder, where Blue is?"

Her growl stopped, stuck in her throat as her heart constricted. Blue?

"Where is he?" Fury and longing was punctuated in each word, and Thunder reached out to claw at the darkness again. Damn this! She couldn't see, couldn't touch, and couldn't smell a thing. "What have you done to him?" If Blue was hurt... Great Starclan, the flea-pelt

who did it would be dog food.

"Oh, nowhere you would like to go. He's safe, with Tigerstar. But Rock? I wouldn't say the same thing about him."

He's safe...with Tigerstar?

"Are you flea-brained? Tigerstar is a monster! The monster, to be exact. How can Blue be safe?"

"Tigerstar's my brother. Trust me or think he's dead. It's not my problem."

"He has a brother?!"

The voice continued as if Thunderpaw had not spoken.

"Anyway, I called you down here-"

"Wait! Where's 'down here'?"

"It's my land, of course. I rule the cats here. The dead and the living will bow down to me. Soon."

"Are you flea-brained?" Thunderpaw repeated, her brain not comprehending what exactly was going on. Her mind wad still stuck on the words 'he's safe'.

"Shut your jaws, Thunderpaw," the cat snarled furiously.

"Who are you anyway?"

"I'm Yakon the Great. You have been identified as a threat to me, and today I shall kill you together with your brothers."

Thunderpaw snarled in defiance. "Never! You will have to kill me first!" Thunderpaw's fur was bristling so wildly that she looked fluffed up twice her size. The cat was undaunted.

"You can't protect them from here, Thunderpaw. But you will walk with me, through the dark forest."

Thunderpaw growled lowly in her throat. What was he up to?

"You can't make me," She sneered, hackles raised.

"Oh, but I can," The voice softened until it was a mere whisper.

And Thunderpaw felt the ground below her crumbling away.

# Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Thunderpaw's heart thudded furiously against her chest as she tried unsuccessfully to calm her nerves. Of course she failed; she was walking beside Yakon, the giant cat who was not supposed to exist. Thunderpaw wanted to believe that this was just a bedtime story, a simple, meaningless dream, but it was all too real, too important to her. She was almost desperate to wake up, but her desperation faded away to excitement as she realised she was about to meet her brother again.

"Blue," She sighed shakily. *She was really going to see him again!*

A tree, a tall, giant oak, stood out from the other thin, dark trees. The oak tree was almost glowing, and Thunderpaw's heartbeat quickened. There, slumped on the tree, was a blank-eyed cat, his fur standing up all over the place, his jaws slack.

He looked dead.

He looked familiar.

*He looked like her brother.*

--

Wolfpaw's eyes were dull as he sank his teeth into his fresh-kill. Amberleaf watched him from his den, her eyes knowing as she shook her head. "Great Starclan, help him out, please," She whispered a soft prayer and retreated into her den. Moonpaw settled down beside him and chose a piece of fresh-kill from the pile.

"Are you alright? You seem really quiet lately."

Wolfpaw fought the urge to ask Moonpaw to buzz off. She was just

trying to be nice. "Thanks for asking, Moonpaw. But I'm fine. I'm just..." *Missing Thunderpaw.* "Tired," he said instead. They ate in silence. Wolfpaw just wanted to be left alone, but how could he say that to Moonpaw without causing her to feel offended? She was eyeing him with that intense gaze, her mismatched eyes sympathetic. "Thunderpaw's gone. It's no use missing her."

Wolfpaw's control snapped like a twig.

"Shut *up*, Moonpaw! You don't know a thing, so don't walk around poking your nose into other cat's business! Don't stare at me with your hideous multi-colored eyes and pretend to understand because you *don't!* Thunderpaw is a useless flea-pelt, and I *don't* miss her one bit! So shove off, Moonpaw!" Wolfpaw's voice grew to a crescendo, his voice sharp and acidic. His words were bitter, his eyes flaming with fury.

Moonpaw looked miserable, her voice cracking as she said, "I'm sorry, Wolfpaw. I just wanted to help." With her tail trailing on the ground behind her, she padded out of the camp to wander around on her own. Wolfpaw's anger melted as quickly as it had come, guilt washing over him. As he stared after Moonpaw's retreating back, his heart slammed.

*What have I done?*

--

Moonpaw padded away, out the camp, down to the riverside. The river seemed to be mourning with her. The water seemed to have dulled- or maybe it was because she was feeling so down. She sat there, by the river, wondering why Wolfpaw was so mad at her. Was it something she said? His voice, loud with fury, rang once more in her mind.

*Shut up, Moonpaw! You don't know a thing, so don't walk around poking your nose into other cat's business!*

Moonpaw buried her head in her paws. Her body sagged in defeat.

*Shut up, Moonpaw! You don't know a thing, so don't walk around*

*poking your nose into other cat's business!*

Was she really that nosy? Why didn't Wolfpaw talk to her the way he talked to Thunderpaw? Tendrils of jealousy wormed their way into her heart. He had been so carefree with Thunderpaw, even if he did sound rude at times. So why did he dislike her so much? Was it because of her eyes?

*Don't stare at me with your hideous multi-colored eyes and pretend to understand because you don't!*

Moonpaw let out a whimper. She looked horrible, didn't she? Such a hideous looking cat. Was it because of her eyes that Wolfpaw treated her differently? His words sounded through her mind again. Her self-esteem dropped ten feet. She would never be able to stare in the river at her reflection with the same smile again. Her eyes had scared Wolfpaw away.

*I hate my eyes. My hideous looking eyes.*

--

"You stupid mange-pelt! You lied to me!"

Yakon just smirked. "I didn't."

"You-You-*Ugh*!" Thunderpaw was so furious that she couldn't think properly. Her eyes didn't seem to be able to function, her gaze remaining glued to the cat in front of her.

The cat's pelt was dark; his fur seemed to have lost its shine. His eyes were closed, his jaws hanging open slightly. His bones were visible against his pelt. Thunderpaw's heart clenched. Yakon had done this.

He would have to pay.

Angry and hurt, Thunderpaw spun to face the white male. "You!" She snarled fiercely, her lip curled to reveal unnaturally sharp fangs. "It's your entire fault!" She yowled in pain and lashed out at him, slashing his nose. Yakon reared back in surprise. His eyes widened as if he could not believe what had just happened.

*"You clawed me?"*

Yakon's surprise slipped away and fury took its place.

His eyes lit up with cold fury and he snarled at Thunderpaw as he advanced slowly toward her. Thunderpaw was blinded by grief and pain, so much that she remained silent and undaunted. Yakon smirked mirthlessly and growled, "You will regret ever hurting me."

With that, he brought a huge, white paw down on Thunderpaw's face, and she dodged a second too slow. His paw slammed down with a resounding thud on her face, followed only moments later by sharp snaps. Pain blasted throughout Thunderpaw's entire body as her face burned with excruciating pain. Reeling back in shock, Thunderpaw first experienced numbness in her face.

When the pain came, it hit her hard. Sharp bolts of pain attacked her face, and she thudded to the floor, trying to dodge them, but she couldn't. Thunderpaw yowled in pain, rolling about on the floor. Excruciating would have been the understatement of the century. Her face felt like it was on fire, as if she had fallen headfirst into a river of boiling water.

Her eyes flashed with a blinding gold.

*"Accept your fate, little one."*

Thunderpaw's face numbed, the pain leaving.

*"You were meant to live. Remember that."*

Something sparkly swirled above her and descended on her paw.

A symbol. A mark.

*A restriction to her freedom.*

# Chapter 10

Chapter 10

Blinking, Tigerstar awoke to muffled yowls. One by one, they were cut off, and thuds followed soon after. His neck fur bristled. Sensing danger, Tigerstar stretched briefly and padded out of his den, spotting his two door guards in an intense battle with two other bigger and stronger cats. He could see that they were depending plainly on their agility to dodge their attacks and deliver weak blows.

What in the name of Starclan was going on?

Silently, he approached Knightmare's cage, his mind whirling. These cats had to be sent by Yakon, or his dark self. They were bigger, stronger and darker.

Furious, he summoned his second-in-command, a loyal and strong warrior from Shadowclan. "Tigerstrike. We are under attack." As he was speaking, he glanced towards the cage, and saw that Knightmare was still there, snarling while pacing back and forth. "I need you to search for Kougar and make sure she's safe."

Tigerstrike nodded once, and then disappeared. Rules from below did not apply to Tigerstar and his clan, and that was how Tigerstrike could flash. Even though Tigerstrike was a warrior, alive and healthy, from the real world, Tigerstar had admired his strength and loyalty, thus recruiting him. Now, he bore two tattoos, one on each foot.

Just as Tigerstar stepped into Knightmare's chamber, Tigerstrike appeared suddenly, barreling into the larger cat. He reeked of anxiety.

Tigerstar's heart plummeted, his eyes flashing to a sinister shade of gold.

“Tigerstar, I’m sorry. I saw her, I swear I tried to catch her, but there were two huge cats and I- she disappeared-I didn’t know-I swear-”

Tigerstar placed a comforting tail on the young warriors shoulder. “It wasn’t your fault, Tigerstrike. Calm down.”

The striped tom’s head lowered, his tail falling to the ground. “But I could have saved her. Her eyes-they were so wide, and she was calling out for you, and I-I’m sorry, so sorry.”

Tigerstar whimpered. She called out for him? A part of him cracked and fell to the ground. She had called for him; and where was he? Sleeping, so soundly. Too soundly. He should felt her fear, should have been awake, taking care of her. He should have been by her side, protecting her.

And now she was gone.

A yowl tore from his throat. A yowl so heartbroken, so pained, that even Tigerstrike whimpered. Tigerstar slashed at the ground, his claws searing deep marks in the soil. When he got her back, he was never going to let her go.

“I’ll find you!” He yowled, a promise to both himself and Kougar.

Then he disappeared.

--

Wolfpaw’s eyes were bleak as he padded back to his nest, curling his tail over his eyes as he settled down to sleep. His life was over. Over. He didn’t ask for this. He didn’t want this kind of life. He didn’t sign up be a guardian, and he didn’t want to get all those visions in his sleep.

And most of all, he wanted to forget Thunderpaw. He wanted to forget the almost dreamy look in her eyes when he spoke to her, the way she wouldn’t meet his gaze when he got close to her. He wanted to forget the way she smelled, a very unique scent he couldn’t identify. Just thinking about her made his heart throb. He wouldn’t deny it any longer.

He missed Thunderpaw, more than he had ever missed his parents, whom he had never known. He wanted her back in Thunderclan. She was the only cat who had ever made him feel special. The way her eyes lit up when she caught him approaching was like toxic. He had to see that look again, even if it was just once more.

I miss you, Thunderpaw. Do you miss me too?

He would give anything to see her again. He couldn't go on like this, with Moonpaw pestering him, the other apprentices giving him pitying looks. He didn't need their pity. Didn't want it. Lately he'd been bad tempered, snappish, and even rude to the elders. Shame swept through him.

If only Thunderpaw could come back...

He sighed with wonder.

She would have made it all better.

--

Thunderpaw blinked rapidly.

Where was she? Why was she here? Why was everything so white?

"Thunder? Are you awake? Holy snow, Aqua! Get your furry ass here, now! Thunder's awake!"

The voice was loud and cheerful.

"How'd you know she's Thunder? She might be Leaves, for all we know."

Another voice, but from further away.

"Dude, she's grey! Are leaves grey? No!"

"What? So what if she's grey! Thunder ain't grey either!"

Who were they talking about? Thunderpaw's head spun as she struggled to keep her eyes open. The blinding white stung her eyes,

and she groaned.

“She’s awake! Quick, get her some water.”

A moment later, something was poking at her mouth, and she cowered away, her paws rising to beat it away.

“Don’t! Drink it. It’ll help, I swear.”

Help? Yes, anything to banish this unpleasant headache.

Thunderpaw let her lower jaw drop and swallowed as icy water slid down her parched throat. Wonderful.

Energy seemed to blast through her veins, pumping her with power. She felt as if she could lift a whole mountain. “What’s that?” She blurted, surprised that her voice came out so strong.

“Oh, it’s nothing. Just some kind of weird water that Boomer made. The pow-wow, as he calls it.”

Thunderpaw giggled. “Who’s Boomer?”

“He’s Fire. Oh god. I forgot to introduce myself! Oh nooo… Pardon me. I’m Frost, Guardian of snow. That tom over there,” Frost angled her head to her right, “is Aqua, Guardian of water. The others aren’t here, though.”

Thunderpaw’s jaw dropped. So she wasn’t the only guardian? Her shoulders suddenly felt lighter, as if a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. “There are others?” Her voice was filled with excitement. Frost nodded her head, settling down on the snow.

“The Great Feline has sensed danger, loads of it. It has summoned three more cat guardians. Now there are a total of six. You’re one of them. Thunder, right?”

Thunderpaw was silent. She didn’t know what she was.

“Oh no; Aqua!” Frost called.

A large male cat sauntered over, his tail swishing. “What?”

“Thundy here doesn’t know her element.”

“What! Why? That’s…”

Aqua and Frost exchanged a weird look that Thunderpaw couldn’t understand.

“That’s so fun!” They chorused, nudging her along. Before long, she saw where they were headed. A huge stone slab stood in the middle, tendrils of plant stems snaking along the stone cracks. Thunderpaw blinked, her head spinning. It looked like some kind of sacrifice altar. What was wrong with her? Why was she going to be sacrificed?

Thunderpaw glanced down at herself; and screeched.

Why was her previous yellow-orange pelt now a beautiful shade of gray, with white stripes running along her flank?

# Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Yakon snarled at the burly tom next to him. “It’s not enough! We need an army, a whole bloody army to defeat the guardians!” The tom growled back, unafraid. “We are trying to raise them! But it’s too cold here, they need warmth! If you don’t do something about this, I’m going back.” Yakon sneered at the warrior. “Go back? To where? It’s not like you can save Kougar anymore.”

Tigerstar’s dark self froze.

“You have Kougar?” His voice was deadly quiet.

Yakon’s blood chilled, but he let smugness mask his fear. “Of course. I knew you would try to run. You were always cowardly, dark self or not.” Tigerstar roared. “I’m not Tigerstar, I’m his darker side. Don’t you dare compare me to that weakling. Kougar was the one who saved him, aka me. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be here right now.”

Yakon licked his chest fur, acting bored even though his heart was pounding. “And what you are trying to say is?”

“Let her go, or I will kill you.”

Yakon sighed. “If you kill me, you’ll die too. I gave you a part of my soul to let you survive. You won’t kill me. You want to rule the Dark Forest and Starclan too. You’re too greedy to do this.” The words were a sneer. Tigerstar smiled cruelly, revealing unnaturally sharp, deadly teeth. He sneered back. Blood dripped from his canines.

“You’re right. I do want to rule. I’m bloodthirsty. I’m greedy. But I’m powerful. More powerful than you, even though you constantly tell me that I’m not. I’m Tigerstar’s darker self. This means I can succumb to evil. It means I don’t have to obey the warrior code. It

means that I am *invincible."*

Tigerstar chuckled menacingly.

Yakon refused to cower. "You want to kill me? Then do it after we conquer the Guardians."

Tigerstar thought for a while. His eyes gleamed. "Of course. You know I'm a fair cat. It will be a one-on-one match, you and I. The one who loses dies."

Yakon tried to mask his fear. "Deal. Now go, raise my army." Tigerstar bristled at the word 'my', but he didn't attack. Yakon cocked his head, waiting. Inside, he was shivering with fear. Then Tigerstar stalked away, and he let out a breath he didn't realize he had been holding. He quaked.

Tigerstar was an impatient cat. It wouldn't be long before he threatened him again.

--

"I can't, I can't do this. I can't live like this, without her," The clan leader's voice was filled with so much despair that Spottedleaf's heart ached. "Is this because of Eaglewing?" Her voice was soft, comforting, but it did nothing to lessen Lionstar's growing ache in his heart. With each day without Eaglewing, his heart had broken more.

He had never yearned for another like that.

Lionstar whimpered, his tail swishing to cover his face. Spottedleaf watched the tom lay despairingly on the ground, his body thinner than the last time she saw him. Even though she was a medicine cat, she had no herb that could cure his heartbreak. "Lionstar, don't do this to yourself," Spottedleaf began, nudging his tail away from his face.

He shook his head, but still lifted his tail away. When he looked up to meet the she-cat's eyes, Spottedleaf almost let out a gasp. Not once had she ever seen any cat so sad, his eyes so empty. Sorrow swirled in those emerald irises, and some of his fur had even turned

white.

“What do I do, Spots? I can’t stop worrying. Every time I close my eyes, all I see is her face… I can’t think of anything else. Cloudstorm’s doing everything for me. I’m useless without her, Spots. I need her back. Can’t you take her back? Won’t you help me?” Lionstar’s voice was layered with sadness; such deep sadness.

Spottedleaf’s heart ached for the orange tom. His stripes seemed faded; his fur seemed to have lost its shine. “I want to, but you know how it is now in Starclan. The Dark Forest grows stronger every day. Power pulses from within; I can feel it. It reeks, Lionstar. It reeks of death and something else. Something worse than Brokenstar. You have to get yourself together, protect your clan. Stop worrying. I’m sure she’s safe somewhere.”

Lionstar growled, the sound loud and frightening. What was she saying? Those words had nothing to do with Eaglewing at all. “Show me where; Tell me. I’m going to find her, I am,” Lionstar spoke those words with such determination, such conviction. Spottedleaf knew that she wouldn’t be able to stop him.

“I won’t even try to stop you, Lionstar. But I’ve had a vision about Eaglewing. She was-” Lionstar snarled, pouncing on Spottedleaf, pushing her against the ground. “Why didn’t you tell me earlier? You knew I missed her.” Spottedleaf sighed. “I didn’t want to give you hope, then smash them when you come back unsuccessful-” Lionstar cut her off again with a deadly, low hiss.

“I won’t fail this. I won’t fail her. I lost her once. I’m not going to lose her again.”

--

Thunderpaw didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry. Sure, her new pelt was prettier than her old fur ever was, but she liked her old fur. Boomer chuckled at her happy-sad expression. “Dude,” He nudged Frost, “look at her. What kind of expression is that?” Frost sniggered back, “feline, I don’t even know.”

Thunderpaw frowned at the duo and cleared her throat.

“Oopsie Thundy, we forgot about you for a moment there. I hope you’re ready,” Frost started, pushing her towards the huge stone. Closer now, Thunderpaw’s eyes were wide as she saw the vines climbing up the rock. They were actually moving in front of her eyes, the tendrils snaking slowly up the altar.

“Awesome,” Thunderpaw breathed. “How?”

Boomer grimaced at her question. “Long story short, the stone is kinda sorta ‘possessed’ by our Guardian King, who controls all elements. He’s also known as Tails.” Thunderpaw stared at the tom blankly. Huh. Complicated much? Thunderpaw shot him a knowing smile, pretending that she knew what he was talking about when she didn’t.

“Great, now let’s begin. Don’t look so scared, Thundy, all you need to do is climb onto it and touch noses with the stone. You’ll be pulled into Tail’s world, Dreamland. He might show you a vision, or maybe appear before you if he wants to.” Frost ended her explanation with a creepy smirk. Boomer’s expression mirrored hers.

Thunderpaw tilted her head. “That’s all?”

“Yup,” Boomer replied.

Thunderpaw sighed, wondering if the cats were keeping something from her.

*Here goes nothing.*

Thunderpaw climbed up the stone, placing her paws in the footholds- yes, footholds, awesome much? - And reached the top soon. She didn’t dare look down. Instead, she lay down and tucked her front paws under her belly. Then she touched her nose to the warm stone, which seemed to be pulsing with energy.

At that moment, a rumble shook the ground, and she found herself falling. A yowl tore from her throat. *Yakon was back to get her. Frost and Boomer were just illusions, fake friends.* As the thought sounded in her head, a voice from reality sent her spiraling back down to the

ground. She landed gently, unscathed.

“Hello, Thunderpaw. You’ve come, at last.”

--

“Wolfpaw, concentrate!” Silverfall, his mentor, yelled once again. The tom’s eyes were bleak and dark, shadows of despair swirling in those chocolate brown eyes. Silverfall sighed in annoyance. “You have great potential, Wolfpaw, and from what I believe, greater than the other apprentices. I have scheduled your assessment from Apprentice to Warrior at moon-high tomorrow, so please, just concentrate.”

Wolfpaw’s eyes brightened for a moment, his gaze meeting his mentor’s. Then he looked at the trees surrounding the training grounds. Longing filled his eyes. “I want to be a warrior with Thunderpaw. She would be so proud of me. She would like me more when I’m stronger. But she’s not here now. What’s the point of promoting me?” Each word was laced with a touch of wistfulness, and Wolfpaw’s paw instinctively dug into the ground, hiding the tattoo.

If she found out that he was a Guardian, she wouldn’t want to be with him. She would think he wouldn’t be able to make time for her.

Wolfpaw’s heart ached so much; he couldn’t breathe. His breath came out in pants.

Silverfall’s eyes widened. “Wolfpaw? Wolfpaw are you alright? Wolfpaw! Wolfpaw!”

Longing, wanting, aching…

Wolfpaw moaned, his heart clenching. *Can’t breathe.* His vision blurred; he wobbled unsteadily on his feet. Silverfall’s face was at his face, blocking his view of the trees. He wanted to snarl, to yowl at him.

*Go away! I must see if she came back, for me. My Thunderpaw, mine…*

Wolfpaw's lungs burned with the need for oxygen, but he couldn't breathe. His chest was constricted, aching. *Thunderpaw. Only Thunderpaw can ease my pain.* Wolfpaw gasped, collapsing weakly onto the sand covered ground. His eyes fought to stay open. Thunderpaw would come for him, wouldn't she? Comforted, Wolfpaw sighed, shutting his eyes in bliss.

*My Thunderpaw…*

# Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Tigerstar groaned. It had taken his every ounce of concentration-and energy-to flash to the place where Kougar was. Blinking dizzily, the dark furred tom grimaced and got unsteadily to his paws. Trees, tall and branchy, surrounded him on all sides. "What in Starclan-" Tigerstar was about to curse when his ears pricked.

*Snap.*

A twig snapped from behind him, and he whirled around, alert. Silence ensued. Nothing sounded; no birdcalls, no sign of squirrels darting away. Uneasy, the male cat turned back and padded quickly away. He didn't like this place. Kougar could be in danger. Worse, she could be injured. Tigerstar snarled at that thought. His female-injured?

Over his dead body.

Motivated by that thought, Tigerstar bounded through the seemingly endless forest, searching for Kougar. Her scent was nowhere to be found. Not even a trace. Frustrated, Tigerstar raced even faster. "Kougar!" He yowled, ignoring the fact that he was giving away his location. "Kougar! Where are you?" He called out once more.

His pelt was prickling with an ominous sense of danger, and his heart was pounding wildly. Kougar, where was she? Anxious now, he paced the forest impatiently, sniffing so hard he was afraid his nose would fall off. "Kougar!" He shouted. He repeated her name over and over again until his throat became dry, his voice turning raspy. *Can't give up. Must find Kougar.* Tigerstar's vision was blurring.

Black dots danced across his eyes.

"Kougar!" He growled. *Answer me, female!*

"Tigerstar?" A feminine whisper sounded to his right. Her voice was so soft, it was barely audible. Something whooshed at his ear. A cry of pain. *Kougar's* cry of pain.

Tigerstar snarled. *Kougar. My Kougar.* "Don't touch her!" His roar shook the earth, and he felt his muscles bunching, growing. He saw red. Literally. He stomped his way over to Kougar, the ground shaking with each step he took. The trees seemed shorter now; and his paws seemed large than normal.

The thought was fleeting. *I've grown.*

Then Kougar's groan jolted his back to reality. He swung his head toward the direction of the voice. "Kougar!" He roared. "Tigerstar," the call was a plea. "I'm coming, sweetheart." He pounded his way to her, and when he finally saw her, he almost collapsed with relief. "Kougar," He whispered her name as if it was a prayer. He felt himself shortening. His red vision ebbed away as he neared the she-cat.

"Kougar," he repeated, sighing. His eyes glowed with relief. The female's eyes shone with hope, but then it winked out, leaving her eyes cold and empty. Why? Wasn't she happy to see him? Tigerstar had barely gathered his thoughts when familiar voice, dark and menacing, boomed from behind him.

"Not so fast, Tiger."

--

"Thunderpaw!" Frustrated, the she-cat growled lowly in her throat. Where'd she disappear off to? She had seen her just a moment ago, on the rock! Then she'd disappeared, and the two cats watching were laughing. What did they do to her? Furious, Eaglewing stalked over to the pair; one bright orange, the other pure white.

"Hey, you! What did you do to Thunderpaw?"

They stopped laughing and turned around, mouths agape. "Who are you?" They chorused. Eaglewing snarled. She didn't have time for

their antics. "Tell me where she is. Now." The white-furred female chuckled. "Well, she disappeared, so that means she's with-" The tom nudged her suddenly, stopping her mid-sentence.

Eaglewing's eyes narrowed.

"She's with?" She probed.

"Someone you don't need to know," The male replied rudely. Eaglewing scowled. *Jerk.* "Who are you?" She tried again. "I'm Frost, he's Boomer. Hi. Nice to meet you," Frost jabbered excitedly. "How did you get in here, though? You aren't one of us. You shouldn't have been able to see us, or this place."

Eaglewing's jaw dropped. What in Starclan was she blabbering about?

"Look, I don't have a clue. All I want to know is where Thunderpaw is, and if she's fine." Boomer shrugged, and glared at her. "She's with our King, and she's fine. But who are you? You're not welcome here." Eaglewing but back her snarl. *Stupid furball.* She glared back at the male. His striped pelt glistened in the sunlight.

*Lionstar.*

He bore an uncanny resemblance to the cold-hearted cat. Just thinking about him made her heart ache. Sadness leaked into her voice as she asked, "By any chance, are you related to Lionstar?" The male's eyes widened, and then narrowed. Something flashed in his dark green eyes. He remained silent, ignoring her question.

Huh. What did that mean?

Irritated that she wasn't getting any answers, she growled. "Someone tell me what's going on!" Frost settled down and curled her tail over her paws. Boomer muttered something that sounded like 'I'm cold, I'll go back first' and stalked away, tail held high. His words sank in and Eaglewing suddenly realized how cold she was. She was literally freezing her fur off, and her teeth started to chatter.

Frost seemed unaffected. She never noticed her shivering, and

began with a sigh. "So, about Thunderpaw. She's a newly appointed Guardian, one of the three-or-four cats who are also going to arrive soon." Eaglewing took advantage to her pause and asked, "What's a Guardian?" Frost explained patiently, "A Guardian is a very special and powerful cat appointed by out leader, the Guardian King. We are basically Immortal beings who can control elements. Thunderpaw was chosen because our leader senses immense danger, and he has to call forth the strongest cats from all over the world. Each cat has a realm, and this is mine."

Hence the name Frost. Oh, it all made sense now.

Eaglewing nodded slowly, trying to absorb the new chunk of information tossed at her. Frost noticed her expression and chuckled softly. "I know, it's a lot to take in. I've been there too, you know. Boomer, or Fire, was with me at that time. Feline, you should have seen our faces." Frost smiled at the memory.

"So how did I get in?"

Frost's smile vanished. "The only time outsiders manage to slip in is when they are super close to a Guardian, or when our leader calls them here." Eaglewing nodded again, realizing that she fell into the first category. "Why did she disappear?" She asked again. "Our leader has chosen to speak to her," Frost smiled, licking her chest fur. Eaglewing continued to bombard the female with questions until a moan from the stone silenced her.

A beautiful grey-white furred she-cat rose from the altar and stretched, her sleek pelt shining under the sun. Eaglewing's jaw dropped.

"Thunderpaw!?"

--

"Spots! I'm so glad you came," the tom sighed. "I've been searching everywhere for her, but her scent's so stale it's disappearing. Cloudstorm is doing great as acting leader, but I need to return soon. I'm really far outside clan territory now. I'm not sure I even know the way home." Spottedleaf remained silent. She looked

nervous. Lionstar stared back at her, his green eyes flickering. Waiting.

"Lionstar, I don't know how to tell you this, but I'm going to try, alright?"

Spottedleaf settled down and Lionstar did the same.

"I've been tracking Eaglewing for the past few days, but she disappeared suddenly, as if she stepped into another world, another dimension."

Lionstar's eyes were blank. His fur was bristling. There was a slim chance that he was never going to see the female again. Spottedleaf rose and pressed her nose to his cheek. "Don't give up yet, Lionstar. Thunderpaw's trail also ended where Eaglewing's did. If you find her, you can find your female too."

Lionstar managed to muster a weak smile. Anxiety was rolling off him in waves. Spottedleaf sighed. "You're quite far from reaching her spot, but you can make it soon. Follow your heart, Lionstar." Spottedleaf felt foolish giving him that piece of advice, considering it didn't turn out well for her. Firestar had fallen for Sandstorm instead, and she was left brokenhearted. She was never one to hold a grudge, and she had maintained a close friendship with either of them.

She continued, still. Lionstar stood too, but before he could go, she told him what she hadn't believed.

"Your heart never leads you the wrong way."

--

Wolfpaw had tried his best to fling Thunderpaw from his mind. He was doing an assessment, and he couldn't afford any distraction. Crouching, his tail careful not to brush the ground, the tom waited for his chance to pounce. The bird pecked at something on the ground. Wolfpaw didn't hesitate. Leaping, he landed squarely on the bird, and he snapped its neck quickly.

That was his last catch, and he dragged his prey back to the camp; a

plump bird, an equally plump vole, and a squirrel. Silverfall was waiting for him at the entrance.

"You did great, Wolfpaw. I'm proud of you."

Lionstar was seated atop the high rock, his gaze brighter than before, but still dull. Silverfall nodded to the striped tom, and he turned to face his clan. "Let every cat old enough to catch their own prey stand beneath the high rock for a clan meeting!"

Anticipation bubbled beneath Wolfpaw's nonchalant demeanor. Thunderpaw was momentarily forgotten.

"Wolfpaw, come here."

Wolfpaw obeyed, fur prickling with excitement.

"Wolfpaw, you have worked hard as an apprentice, and we appreciate what you have done for the clan. You have learnt what you must, and now I will give you your warrior name and tattoo." Lionstar bounded off the rock and stood face to face with the young tom. Wolfpaw met his leader's warm gaze, and in his eyes reflected his weariness despair. *He must be missing Eaglewing too.*

"From now on, you will be called Wolfstrike."

Choruses of his name were called out by the Thunderclan cats. He was proud, but the empty feeling in his chest was almost too much for him to bear. *Thunderpaw should be with me, receiving her warrior name.* Sadness leaked unknowingly into his voice as he thanked his clan leader. His tattoo now burned bright gold on his paw, his apprentice one gone. On his other paw, the Guardian's tattoo glowed a beautiful shade of blue.

As he continued to stare at that unwanted mark on his paw, the water spirit's words rang in his mind once again, reminding him of his other responsibilities.

*"Hear my cry as the guardians fall; see the darkness as it overwhelms all. Feel the Earth as it cracks and roars, taste the bitter-sweet poison of revenge."*

The happiness of turning into a warrior died out as quickly as it came. *I don't want to do this. I hate it.* Wolfpaw ran out the camp, ignoring the cried for him to go back. He bounded to his sanctuary, and curled into a ball beside the waterfall, shutting his eyes angrily.

*I hate this. I hate my life. I hate myself.*

--

Firepaw paced the length of his cage, starving and thirsty. Trees grew on all sides of him, but there was no sign of any other living thing. He snarled lowly, remembering the huge, white cat that had taken him to Blue, just to find out that he was already dead. That memory brought back a fresh wave of sadness. Blue, his brother, dead...

The truth was too much to bear.

If Thunderpaw was dead too, he would kill the tom, whoever he was. His stomach grumbled, and Firepaw flinched. He'd never been this hungry. "Let me out!" He roared, and almost collapsed. He was weak, so weak. And it was all Lionstar's fault. He was anything but loyal.

He was a liar, a stupid furball, a mange-pelt, cunning... Firepaw continued to curse his former leader in his head. Something rustled beside him. Fear struck his heart; he was too weak to protect himself, and even the cage wasn't much of a protection. "Who's there?" He growled, hackles raised, pelt bristling.

"Firepaw? Hey, it's me. Kougar."

Firepaw blinked. Kougar? The female who was captured with him? He'd had only a glimpse of her, but he could tell she was beautiful, her spotted and striped- how cool was that? -brown pelt sleek and shiny.

"Did you get out?" His voice was hoarse and scratchy from his thirst.

"Yeah. My friend came," She replied, just as a deep male voice growled, "Who is that?"

Two faces came into view. Kougar, her emerald eyes glittering, and another, larger and bigger. "Come on, let's go," the male turned to leave. Firepaw's hope died out. Kougar held him back, and protested until he finally caved in. "You'd better follow quickly. I'm not waiting for anyone," his words were no more than a hiss, and Firepaw nodded.

He wasn't even scared of anything, anymore. Yes, surprises after surprises can do that to you.

He trailed behind the two cats as they tried to find a way out of the forest. Sunlight filtered through the leaves, shining patches of light at the ground. Firepaw barely paid attention to the beauty of nature, to busy trying to keep up with the tom's ridiculously fast pace. A patch of light, bigger than normal, caught his eye.

"Hey, Kougar!" He called.

The cats turned back to face him. The tom was scowling.

"Look," He waved his tail at the patch of light. Leaves swirled up, floating, higher and higher, until they disappeared in the clouds. Firepaw's eyes were bright and eager.

"That's our way out."

--

# Chapter 13

Chapter 13

Thunderpaw stretched, yawning sleepily as if she had just woken up from a dream. Feline, that Guardian King was weird! Yet he had this aura which radiated with power; almost too much. Thunderpaw sighed and stood, bunching her hind legs as she prepared to jump down the altar.

"Thunderpaw?!"

A shocked cry from below surprised her, causing her to shriek as she tumbled down the rock. She managed to land on her paws, but her mind was still blank from the shock. "Eaglewing? What-how-what-? How? What are you doing here? How?" Thunderpaw's words were a jumbled mess, her eyes not comprehending the sight in front of her.

Eaglewing, the ideal mother figure whom she had always dreamed of, was standing in front of her, face cocked to one side in confusion. "Thunderpaw! What happened to you?" Thunderpaw was just about to ask the same thing. Eaglewing's fur was sticking up all over the place, pieces of fur lost in some places. Thunderpaw's jaw was hanging open, wanting to say something but not knowing what.

"Eaglewing...Hi," Thunderpaw mewed quietly.

"Hi? That's all you're going to say?" Eaglewing's eyes were wide with shock, which was slowing morphing into anger. "After all I've been through to find you? I fought dogs, a whole pack of it, almost drowned in a river, got stuck in the mud and couldn't get out, then-" Thunderpaw cut her off mid rant, blurting out the word that was at the tip of her tongue.

"M-Mom!"

--

Lionstar groaned as he entered Starclan territory again. Spottedleaf was already waiting for him at the usual spot. "How's your search?" She asked, even though she already knew the answer. Collapsing at her feet, Lionstar whimpered sorrowfully. "I don't have a clue as to where she could have gone! Her scent doesn't stand out anywhere! I don't know what to do, Spots. I want to find her, I do, but this is becoming unacceptable.

"My clan looks at me with this weird look now, because I'm pushing all my duties to Cloudstorm. I've heard whispers too, and I- I feel like I've failed them. I don't know what do."

Spottedleaf stared at the clan leader, her heart aching for him. The pain he must be feeling right now... Spottedleaf sighed, turning away from the male cat. If he kept coming to her, not pushing the limits, he would never be able to find Eaglewing. He had to decide between him and Eaglewing, and Spottedleaf didn't want to influence his decision. "I told you to follow your heart. Stop coming back to me," She ordered coldly, turning away before she blurted out an apology. "Spots? What-" Spottedleaf ran into the forest, leaving him behind.

*He must learn.*

--

Yakon snarled furiously at the air. His plans were ruined. Ruined! "Tigerstar! I order you here, now!" Within seconds, the dark warrior appeared in front of him. "What's the problem with you? It's not even sun-up yet! I was sleeping!" Tigerstar's dark side growled, his ears flicking in irritation. Yakon hissed, enraged.

"You failed me, warrior!"

"How so?" The comment held an undertone of amusement. Fury sparked beneath Yakon's pelt.

"You let the female go."

"So?" Tigerstar admitted it openly, not bothering to defend himself.

"Why? I told you she was important!"

"Relax, stupid. All she served as was a distraction here. If we give her back, Tigerstar would pamper her, and ignore us. Wasn't that what you wanted?"

Yakon's growl died in his throat. *He was right,* he realized.

"Right. I'm sorry," He apologized gruffly. Tigerstar snickered at him mockingly, and then padded away, tail held high. Yakon glared at his retreating back and hissed. What was wrong with him? Tigerstar managed to let the female escape, and he couldn't do a thing. So what if he was right? He wanted Kougar to be on *his* side, not Tigerstar's!

The realization slammed into him like a ten-ton brick wall.

Yakon's jaw dropped, his face scrunching in confusion. *He liked that she-cat?*

--

Tigerstar scowled, unhappy that it was the other male that had noticed the beam of light first. Kougar was praising him, going on and on about how smart he was, how observant, blah blah blah. "Can you shut up?" He snapped finally, anger boiling in his veins. He didn't really care that he was being really rude right now.

They had finally arrived back at the real world, and that flame-pelted male was looking so smug; Tigerstar wanted to claw that smile off his face. Kougar's back was to him, and she was chatting away with the other tom. "Don't be like that, Tigerstar," She chuckled, and turned back to Flamepaw, or whatever his name was.

Tigerstar's eyes went so wide he was surprised that his eyeballs didn't fall out. Did she really just say that to him? Did she even know what he was feeling right now? Furious now, his eyes sparking red with anger, Tigerstar pounced onto the male, aiming for his throat. The younger cat never knew what was coming.

He was about to sink his teeth in to deliver the killing bite when someone pushed him off. "Tigerstar!" Kougar's voice was shrill with horror. "Why did you do that?" Tigerstar blinked, some of the rage

wearing off. His eyes went back to the original brown colour. He sheathed his claws, eyes wide.

What did he just do?

--

The moon was unusually bright that night. Its reflection rippled on the surface of the water. The swaying trees cast eerie shadows along the forest ground. Wolfpaw stared wistfully at the moon, wondering if Thunderpaw was looking at it too. Was she thinking about him? Was she happy where she was?

Was she with another cat?

Rage filled him, so potent that he almost roared, yowling his fury to the moon. When he finally calmed down, guilt and confusion speared him. Guilty that he was losing sleep over a she-cat, not helping out with clan duties back at the camp. Confused that he was feeling this way over a female he hated, and the female who hated him back.

His feelings for her were pointless, he realized. She was probably starving somewhere, angry and cursing his name, for 'selling her out' for something she didn't do. And he never had the chance to correct her.

Never had a chance to confess his feelings for her.

Wolfpaw mewled in sorrow. If only his dad were here, he'd give him advice. Wolfpaw sighed. He had never truly hated Thunderpaw. He had actually liked her from the start. He knew better than to get close to her, like her father did chasing his mom. His mother, Starlight, was a gorgeous she-cat from the Outside, and they were secretly seeing each other.

Starlight gave him a kit- which was Wolfpaw. Unfortunately, she had refused to see a medicine cat and gave birth to the baby herself, causing her own death. His father was torn. He kept to himself, and he only ever talked to Wolfpaw. He was all he had left of his mate. No one in the clan knew about his birth mother, except for him and

his dad, who had died due to a fox invasion.

Wolfpaw was only trying to protect his heart, and his constant teasing was the only thing that kept Thunderpaw a distance away. He led her to believe that he despised her, but what he truly felt was a strong feeling that he had never felt for any other she-cat. He was attracted to her, pulled into her beauty and fun-loving personality.

She was an ideal mate.

Now, Wolfpaw wasn't sure if he was ever going to see her again. Chances were slim, close to zero, even, and his will to survive was dropping every passing hour, every minute gone by. He has been infected by love, and there was only one cure to his disease.

*Thunderpaw*, he thought adoringly, curling his tail around his front paws as he drifted off into sleep. *Thunderpaw is my cure.*

--

Lionstar winked in and out of sleep. His dreams were becoming memories of his time together with Eaglewing, and damn if those memories didn't make him cranky when he woke up in the morning just to discover that she hasn't returned. But that wasn't what made him annoyed.

He was pissed at himself, because he was the reason that Eaglewing had left his side.

His side was where she belonged, damn it.

She couldn't just leave like that. It wasn't fair for the other party.

Lionstar growled at his moss bed. He didn't like sleeping alone every night. Eaglewing should be here, sleeping next to him, whispering her secrets to him. Him, and only him. Lionstar's anger cranked up another level. He clawed at the den, leaving huge claw marks at the side. Eaglewing. That name made him feel too many things that he shouldn't feel.

He was clan leader. Clan leaders shouldn't be distracted by love.

He froze. Love? Did he really love Eaglewing? His anger subsided. Warmth filled him from head to paw. Yes. He did.

He slumped onto the moss bed again, tail thumping unhappily on the ground. He missed her. So, so much. It was eating him up inside with every day that passed without him seeing her lovely face.

*I love you, Eaglewing. So please... just come back.*

# Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Yakon surveyed the Demon Fields with a satisfied grin. Everything was finally going as he wished. Tigerstar stood by his side, tail flickering back and forth. Boredom showed on every inch of his face. He didn't look as excited as Yakon thought he would be. Uneasy, fear weaving an icy tentacle around his heart, the white tom turned to face the smaller cat.

"You look bored."

A snort. "I am."

"Why? Isn't this everything you ever wanted?"

"No. Not everything. The female is mine. Tigerstar stole her. I was the one who freed her. Why didn't she follow me instead?" Hate dripped from each and every word.

"The female will only serve as a distraction. Didn't you say that?"

"I lied. I wanted her for myself. I thought I could live without her but I thought wrong. I have to get her back."

Yakon hissed, his neck fur bristling. "You're going to back out now? After all we've done?"

"I only joined you because I thought we could kill Tigerstar so that I could live. I will do anything to make sure I survive, and this shit you're doing right now isn't letting me live. The female will."

"What are you saying, feline?"

"I'm saying, Yakon, that I'd rather choose a female than you, my own brother. Goodbye, flea-pelt."

Tigerstar chuckled boomingly, his eyes flashing with menace. Then

he disappeared in a puff of dark, violet smoke.

Yakon roared in fury. “No!” He bared his teeth in rage; sneered at the empty space. His eyes were blazing blue fire. Tigerstar had tricked him. He’d only ever wanted the female. He’d used him, his own brother. Yakon let out a screech. Revenge would be served. Stalking away, mind whirring, Yakon hatched a plot to defeat Tigerstar.

He was going to use him, just like he did.

--

Thunderpaw’s eyes widened. Crap, did she just say that? Out loud? Crap, crap, double crap. Nervous, she stood stiffly, muscles tense as she waited for- what? What was she waiting for? For Eaglewing to turn away, disgust in her eyes? For Eaglewing to yell at her for calling her ‘Mom’?

“T-Thunderpaw, I-I-” Eaglewing’s words emerged as a confused stutter.

Thunderpaw’s heart fell. She didn’t know what she was waiting for Eaglewing to say, but ‘Thunderpaw’ wasn’t what she wanted to hear. Crestfallen, her head lowered, tail thumping unhappily on the ground. “Sorry, I didn’t mean-”

“Thunderpaw, my child,” Her name was muttered as a sob.

Eaglewing leapt onto the younger cat and licked her all over. “Great Starclan, Thunderpaw. Where have you been? I tried so hard to find you! Are you hurt? Did-” Thunderpaw laughed in surprise and wonder. Her heart filled with so much happiness she thought it would burst. Yes, this was what she had been waiting for.

For Eaglewing to finally acknowledge her as her daughter.

Thunderpaw was dizzy with merriment. However, her heart felt empty on one side. As if she was missing something. Someone. Her happiness died as quickly as it came. Eaglewing must have sensed the change, because she frowned and stared at her. “My heart,” Thunderpaw muttered. “It hurts.”

Her eyes widened, her mouth agape as bolts after bolts of pain shot her heart. Her knees buckled and she crashed onto the snowy ground. Whimpering, Thunderpaw breathed in shallow breaths, her body trembling violently. Her heart continued to pound, and with each beat, sharp pain lanced through her body.

Eaglewing stared at the she-cat worriedly. What was going on? Was she sick?

Thunderpaw writhed on the ground, her face contorted in pain. Her eyes were rolled back in her head. “Thunder!” A cry from behind jolted Eaglewing back into reality. “What’s going on? What did you do?” The female, Frost, raced toward Thunderpaw like lightning, Boomer at her side.

“Thunder, look at me. Focus, female.” Thunderpaw didn’t give any indication that she’d heard the she-cat. “Thunderpaw! Listen, you’ve got to look at me. C’mon, you can do better than that. Focus on my voice. Yes, that’s it. Fight the pain. Focus, Thunder.”

Soon, Thunderpaw stopped moaning, and she curled into a ball instead, sniffling. She refused to look at anyone. She buried her head in the snow, her body trembling. Boomer stared at her sympathetically and whispered something to Frost. Her expression softened, and she nodded, padding away. Boomer cocked his head towards Thunderpaw, and then padded away too.

Eaglewing approached the young cat slowly. “What’s wrong, Thunderpaw?” Her voice was soft, comforting. Thunderpaw answered with a sniffle and a shake of her head. “It’s okay, Thunderpaw. You can tell me.” Thunderpaw’s tail thumped onto the snow dejectedly. When she turned to face Eaglewing, Eaglewing was struck by the sorrow on her face.

Devastation swirled in her bleak blue eyes.

“It’s Wolfpaw. He’s hurting.”

--

Firepaw glared at Tigerstar furiously. “Why did you do that?”

Kougar glared at him too, her eyes shooting bolts of fire. “You could have hurt him,” her voice was soft.

Immediately, guilt speared the dark pelted male. Damned Kougar and her honey-sweet voice. “I’m sorry,” He blurted out. He was helpless against Kougar; he needed to please her in every way. He didn’t mean his apology, however, and added, “It’s his fault. He shouldn’t have smiled at you.”

Kougar’s eyes narrowed in confusion. “Excuse me?”

Tigerstar shot a frigid glare at the other tom, ignoring her.

“She’s mine. Don’t touch her.”

--

Lionstar couldn’t take this anymore. The glares were becoming more than just displeased; no, they were cold, frigid stares. He whimpered, burying his head deeper in his paws. He wanted to run away; to Eaglewing. She would have comforted him, would have helped him clear up the mess he’d made.

Frustrated, his pelt crawling, Lionstar growled. Eaglewing was the only cat he ever wanted. Why couldn’t he have her? Fate was cruel, he cursed.

You did this, his inner voice chided coldly.

Fix it, his heart cried.

Protect your clan, his mind intoned.

Lionstar roared.

Snarling, he stalked out the clan, eyes red with fury. Eaglewing had started this. This turmoil of emotions. Now, she was going to end it. Lionstar smiled grimly. Oh, he was going to get his revenge.

“I’ll find you.”

--

Lionstar didn't know where he was heading. His heart was his compass, pointing the ways to his other half. Eyes burning, stomach rumbling, Lionstar groaned and collapsed onto the icy ground. His body barely registered the cold, starved as he was. Shivering, Lionstar wrapped his tail around his body, trying unsuccessfully to keep himself warm. "Eaglewing," He mumbled sorrowfully. "Help me," He pleaded.

"Lionstar!" The voice sounded far, so far away. Lionstar's focus blurred. His ears perked at the sound of the familiar male voice. Wolfstrike. A patter of footsteps; a low murmur of voices. What was going on? Confused, his blood thick was lethargy, Lionstar's mouth opened to speak, but nothing came out.

"Relax, Lionstar," Wolfstrike spoke, his voice low. The clan leader smiled, glad that someone had found him. "Eat," He urged, pushing something white towards him. He could barely keep his eyes open. However, he trusted the young cat completely, and ate it silently, devouring it within seconds.

Guilt washed over him like a tidal wave. Lionstar felt shame heat up his pelt. He'd had to depend on his clan mate to catch prey for him, a clan leader. His guilt didn't last long, however, when the murmur of voices came back.

"Lionstar!"

That voice was so familiar. Lionstar struggled to stay awake.

"Lionstar, please."

He whimpered. He knew that voice. He missed that voice.

"Open your eyes, look at me. I'm sorry for running away, but I couldn't have left them alone. I'm so sorry, Lionstar; so sorry." A sniffle.

Lionstar whimpered, softer now. The darkness washed over his mind, but he had figured out who the speaker was.

Eaglewing. I have found you.

# Chapter 15

Chapter 15: Reunited

Wolfstrike wasn't thinking clearly anymore; after all, he was hungry, exhausted, and wasn't exactly in the best mood, since he'd given his first catch since three sundowns to Lionstar. They were alike in so many ways, yet different too. Vision flashing black and white, Wolfstrike could barely walk in a straight line.

His stomach was cramping badly, and his head spun with dizziness. The hunger was too much. The voices around him were muffled, and his ears twitched, trying to identify the speakers.

"Wolfpaw…hear…answer…"

The voice was familiar. He knew that voice. He blinked, but could barely keep his eyes open.

"Wolfpaw!"

His heart pounded.

"Wolfpaw! Please, Wolfpaw…"

He reached out weakly. That voice. That wonderful, amazing voice. He knew it, recognized it.

Craved it.

Struggling to place a name with that voice, and fighting to stay conscious, he tried to speak, but nothing came out.

"Wolfpaw, what do you need?"

*Food. You. All I need is you…*

*Thunderpaw.*

At last, at the thought of the female cat, his heart went into overdrive; and suddenly he was mewling and snarling at the same time, the hunger pangs forgotten. Yet his vision still swam. He reached out again, paw touching fur- no, muzzle. He memorized the shape, the feel, and leaned towards that warmth.

“Thunderpaw,” It was a pain to speak through the hunger, but he managed. He had to say it, before he missed this chance.

“I’ve missed you.”

He felt her tumble on top of him, licking him everywhere.

“I’ve missed you too, Wolfpaw! You stupid furball, why’d you come after me? And look at yourself. All fur and bones. You must be starving. Stupid, stupid tom.”

Thunderpaw’s voice was shaky and husky, but filled with concern and affection. Wolfstrike smiled weakly, and mustered up his last bit of strength to reply, and was finally unable to resist the strong pull of darkness.

“Because you’re mine.”

--

“At last, my five guardians are present.”

Thunderpaw’s jaw dropped. Five? Looking around, she saw Eaglewing, Lionstar, Wolfstrike, who had told her his new name, Frost and Boomer. There were only three guardians.

“Aqua, Guardian of the sea. Show yourself.”

From near them, a patch of snow melted, forming a puddle. A beautiful, blue-gray pelted she-cat emerged, shaking water from her fur. When she finally turned to look at them, Thunderpaw was shocked to find her gaze icy and pale. However, when she smiled tentatively at her, the she-cat smiled back.

“Welcome, Guardians. The naming ceremony will now commence.”

Confused, Wolfstrike and Thunderpaw exchanged glances, each wondering who the last guardian was. Could it be Lionstar? Unanimously, both cats turned to stare at their clan leader, who was too busy staring into Eaglewing's eyes. The young pair blushed and turned their attention back to the Guardian, who had finally materialized.

And damn if he wasn't big. He towered over the cats, a huge, formidable being, a true Guardian king.

"Aqua, Boomer, Frost. You have been through this, so you may be excused. Eaglewing, Lionstar, you are not guardians. Leave. Everyone else, stay."

"Wait…Wolfstrike?!"

"Wait… Thunderpaw?!"

--

Wolfstrike couldn't believe what he was hearing or seeing. Thunderpaw was a guardian, too? All that time he'd spent worrying; it had been useless.

"Wolfstrike, step forward."

As he did, the air around them changed, and suddenly they were in a cave, with an altar in the middle. Steps led up to the middle raised platform, and Wolfpaw trotted up, fearful and excited at the same time.

"Thunderpaw, your turn."

Gracefully, the she-cat bounded up the steps to stand beside him.

"Wolfstrike. You are courageous, kind, and a formidable warrior. You will fight to protect your loved ones, yet your heart is a closed door. Open it, let your mate in, and you will be a perfect guardian."

The Guardian kind smiled kindly, and continued, "Thunderpaw. You are brave, kind too, and smart. Because many loved ones have disappeared from your life, you are unsure of loving again, but are

willing to give it a shot. I admire you for that. Also, you have great skills, and I know you will be a capable guardian."

"I have completed my assessment of you. Now, let the elements choose you."

The ground shook, and somewhere ahead, thunder rumbled. It started to pour, heavily, even though they were in a cave. Thunderpaw felt refreshed, powerful. And she knew then, that this was her element. She would control the rain, the storms, thunder.

"You shall now be known as Thunder."

As the ground shook, a huge cavity opened up, and from it bounded dozens of wolves. They leapt up to crouch at Wolfstrike's feet. And he knew, that that was his element. He would control the wolves.

"You shall be known as Wolf."

The guardian king smiled.

"Wolves are powerful creatures, Wolfstrike. They have never chosen a guardian before. Be honored. And Thunderpaw, your element is an incredibly dangerous and reckless entity. Tame it; learn its ways, before you attempt to use it."

Then the Guardian King disappeared, and so did everything else.

--

# Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Wolf and Thunder fell again, back into the abyss, landing on solid ground a moment later. And when they did, they were no longer on the snow. They were back at the camp, and the moon was completely shrouded in the darkness.

"Lionstar!" Wolf cried softly so as to not wake his clanmates, and raced towards his leader.

"Wolfstrike, what happened?" He turned, and that was when Wolf noticed the she-cat by his side. "Eaglewing?" He stuttered. "I thought you..."

To his surprise, she pressed closer to the clan leader and purred. "I guess I couldn't leave my soul mate after all."

The words 'soul mate' struck something in his heart. Unconsciously, he turned to look at Thunder. Even though her fur was now gray, he still saw the same old Thunderpaw in her, the same she-cat he used to—and still did— love.

Thunder caught him staring and shot him a questioning look. His pelt warmed with embarrassment and he turned away. "Yeah," he finally replied lamely.

"Well, it turns out we're both Guardians... and our names have changed. Again. I'm Thunder, and he's Wolf."

Lionstar nodded, and lowered his head his to speak in a soft whisper. "Come into my den. We should discuss this matter in private."

The four cats managed to squeeze themselves into Lionstar's den. Wolf was rather surprised; it was more spacious than he had

thought.

"This thing about being guardians— Eaglewing explained it to me. So that's what you two are? Are there any other cats out there like you?" Lionstar's eyes glimmered with unhidden interest. "Of course. There are five of us. Me, Thunder, Aqua, Frost, and-" Eaglewing cut Wolf off with a soft meow, "Boomer."

Lionstar's eyes turned wide, and he started to bristle.

"Boomer? My brother?" His voice was uneven.

The three cats stared at him, waiting, for him to explain himself, but he didn't. All he did was stare back, silent, at nothing, as if he was lost in a distant memory. Finally, with unseeing eyes, he spoke, quietly.

"Boomer was the typical younger brother, too mischievous and too arrogant for his own good. He was loud, cocky, but was also a fun sibling. My life was never boring. Until one day, he disappeared after going out to hunt. Some said he drowned- others said he eloped with a mate. But I didn't know what to think, didn't know what to believe, so I thought about everything, and believed everything." His eyes were flaring with horror.

*"I believed that my brother was dead."*

--

Tigerstar growled. There was something, a presence of evil, lurking somewhere. "Stay close to me, Kougar. And you too, kit," He added after a moment's hesitation. Firepaw snarled, but made no comment. He could sense it too. Tigerstar felt his heart jerk, and for a moment his vision flashed red. He let out a low growl.

"It's Tigerstar."

Firepaw stared at him in confusion. "Of course it's Tigerstar. Have you forgotten your own name?" But Kougar understood. They both knew the evil his dark self was capable of.

"What do you want?" Tigerstar asked the supposedly empty forest. A

gentle breeze blew by, and with it came the wind's whisper.

*You know what I want.*

*You are I, and I am you.*

Tigerstar thought for only a moment. But he couldn't believe it. "You can't possibly be thinking-"

*Why not? Remember, we are one. If you want something, I do, too.*

His blood ran cold.

"No, I cannot give her to you. *Not her.*"

Firepaw's eyes narrowed as pieces of the puzzle began to fix themselves together.

A chuckle, low and menacing, echoed eerily throughout the forest, rushing by their ears in a gust of wind.

*Learn to share, Tigerstar. I'm the dark one, not you. I won't kill her. Let me just... play with her for a bit. Or forever.*

Tigerstar was so agitated that he couldn't think clearly. His dark self was unpredictable. Who knew what he would do if he didn't comply? Yet, he knew he could never let Kougar go, not after he just saved her, not after he just promised himself never to let her go. He started to feel hot under his pelt, feeling as if the forest was closing in on him.

"No, Tigerstar. Go find your own plaything. Kougar is a beautiful cat, and she's mine."

Tigerstar, his dark self, materialized, grinning, showing his glinting white canines as he took slow steps towards them. His eyes were glowing white. "Didn't I tell you, what's yours is mine?"

Without warning, he leapt onto Kougar.

--

Eaglewing could feel the tension rolling off Lionstar in waves. His fur was rising on the ends, and he seemed to be growling lowly at something unseen. No one spoke a word, until Lionstar himself finally sighed, a soft forlorn, "Boomer."

Eaglewing shivered; she'd never heard, or felt, so much emotion in one word. The longing, regret was so clearly laced in his brother's name that her own heart ached for Lionstar.

"Lionstar," She mewed, brushing her tail gently across his raised hackles. Immediately, he stopped growling, and snapped out of his daze. And, to her amazement, he started sniffling, and slowly, he looked at her with dull eyes, and buried his head into her fur.

"Eaglewing..."

His voice was soft, husky. No one else mattered then.

"Stay with me."

# Chapter 17

Chapter 17

"Kougar!"

His warning came a second too late. He met her eyes, the shock and fear flaming in her wide, innocent eyes, her mouth open in a silent yowl- a sound that was never heard. Because the next moment she was gone, gone once again, the air around them still as ever, as if nothing had changed.

Tigerstar's own mouth was open. A pleading whimper escaped him. It was too quiet. So quiet it deafened him. His eyes were wide, as wide as Kougar's a moment ago. His heart couldn't believe what had just happened, and his mind seemed to be locked into a standstill.

"Kougar...?"

He whispered her name, full of hope that she would reply. And when she didn't, his heart finally broke apart, the already shattered pieces breaking even more, the agony like claws digging into his chest. He barely noticed the existence of the other male, and he didn't care.

His mind spun. Tigerstar. It was his dark soul that did this. It was a part of his soul that did this. His fault. *His fault.* He never should have let the dark side take over.

*Yes, this is your fault. Your entire fault. What you want, I will always want. Until you truly lose your love for her, I will always want her.*

His dark side's words ghosted from the wind, sending chills down his spine.

Tigerstar wanted to yowl, he wanted to run away and just find her, to tear his dark side into shreds, but he couldn't. His soul was in pieces, his life was seeping away with every second without Kougar by his side, and he was staring at the empty forest, frozen. His eyes were empty, staring at the beautiful forest, but seeing nothing, feeling nothing but helplessness.

Because there was nothing a broken cat could do.

--

Lionstar didn't know how long he had leaned on Eaglewing. It felt right, like home, and he didn't want to move. He wanted to forget everything, his brother, the prophecy, and the guardians. Then he moved away and stared into Eaglewing's gentle eyes, and felt like he had the strength to take on the world, because his female was back where she belonged, by his side.

"I'm sorry, Eaglewing. I just—"

Eaglewing purred and licked his cheek.

"It's okay, Lionstar. Everything will be okay. Don't worry so much, alright? Starclan is helping us."

Lionstar's chest clenched with an emotion he had never felt before. Yet now, staring into Eaglewing's yellow-green eyes, he knew, without a doubt, what he felt was love. A love he had never felt for any other cat, a love he would never ever feel with any other cat.

They stared at each other in silence, a silence that spoke volumes. They had been with one another for so long, no words were needed to understand each other. Lionstar rubbed his cheek with Eaglewing's and his eyes shut, as he whispered in her ear, like a secret, the words he had always wanted to tell her.

"I love you."

Her purr delighted him as she shifted closer to him, her reply almost sending him yowling his elation to Starclan.

"I'm yours, Lionstar."